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SERMONS

BY

JOHN MACKENZIE, D. D.

MINISTER OF FORTPATRICK.

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Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem.

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ADVERTISEMENT:

OR

PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE:



THE Author of the following Discourses has a few things which he wishes to mention to his readers. He had entitled them originally, *Discourses* and *Sermons*, to prevent any difference of opinion about the *name* which they ought to bear.—It may be thought, farther, that, as some of them are long, to give the reader a proper pause, or resting place; he ought to have divided them. This, he knows, is the usual way; but he conceived that he could not do it, in the present case, without interrupting the stream, and weakening the energy, of his argument. The reader, when he is tired, must just lay the book aside, until he shall be disposed to begin again, if he should feel himself so disposed. And this he would probably have done at any rate.

A

The Author, in some of these Dicourses, where the subject led to it, has conceived it to be his duty to insist very particularly upon the vices to which the more opulent classes of the society are exposed. People, whose minds are engrossed with politics, may think this an improper subject for the present day. From these people the Author must beg leave totally to differ. He is, he trusts, as determined an enemy to the present French system as any man living. He deplores the confusions which have arisen, and which must always necessarily arise, under that system. He has beheld, with sorrow and consternation, the fatal doctrine held forth, that the interests of the rich, and of the poor, are different; and, in consequence of this principle, has seen the multitude throwing from them all restraints, rising against their natural magistrates, and perpetrating the most unparalelled atrocities. But, let us look back, I call, with the utmost seriousness, upon the better classes, to look back, to the origin of these disorders. It has always been found the most difficult of all sciences, to govern well. The multitude cannot always be restrained, even by the best re-

gulations, administered in the best manner; But when their governors, when those to whom they naturally look up for direction and example, do not *their* duty, what is to be expected? When *they*, who should protect, oppress; when *they*, who should restrain injury, commit it; when *they*, who seem the most obliged to God, forget, or renounce God;—when the enlightened, and elevated part of the Society, are the first to throw from them all restraints, human and divine, and to ridicule and condemn all distinctions between good and evil; when, in short, *they*, who are most interested to do right, themselves do wrong, and inculcate the doing of wrong:—Are they surprized, when they see the multitude follow them? Are they surprized, when they teach the people that their interests are different, that the people should believe them?—When they inculcate upon the people that they are a different species, that they should find themselves treated as such?—When they set examples of licentiousness, that the multitude should be licentious?—Or, when they oppress and trample them under their feet, that they should become furious?

Let not the rich think me their enemy, when I recal their attention to these scenes. I wish I could say that they are ideal. But they not only have existed, but, in my opinion, they have been the grand cause of all the disorders which have afflicted, and for ever disgraced, the present period. We have seen, with equal sorrow and astonishment, not only in France, but in this country, and in all countries, the very people, who are most interested in upholding the pillars of Society, guilty of the extreme folly and wickedness of pulling them down. They have done it with their own hands,—I cannot say with their eyes open. They have taught the people to despise every thing that is serious and proper :—They have been at great pains to teach them this wise lesson :—And they have seen, and felt the consequences.

The people, from their ignorance and natural levity, are of themselves at all times sufficiently prone to change. We need not certainly take pains to prepare them for it, or to precipitate them upon it.

The events of the present period will teach an awful lesson, if they can receive a lesson,

to both parties. It will teach them that the interests of all the orders of the political society are the same; that the rich and the poor are mutually necessary to one another; and that they must stand or fall together. Alas, what shall I say? From the beginning of the world they have been taught this lesson,—to no purpose.

Hence the real cause of the successes of the French. They found the soil prepared, and the materials laid. They had nothing to do, but set fire to the train. The explosion, as might be expected, instantly took place, and passed, like a conflagration, through the countries. Nor will it cease, until the people feel, as I hope, they begin to do, that one extreme is as bad as another; that the destruction of the rich involves the destruction of the poor; that, where property is not respected, society cannot exist; that, where principle is discarded, where Religion is lost, where good and evil are confounded, mankind find themselves at once driven back to barbarism, and become thieves, robbers, and murderers. It is then put to the law of the strongest; where, I think, the wild beasts

must finally prevail ; and the human species, the criminal, vitiated, foolish human species, having thus thrown all their advantage from them, will be extirpated.

Ardently wishing, as every good citizen ought, to prevent this, and desirous of contributing my small effort for this purpose, upon whom can I call but upon the enlightened part of the society ? The multitude never see, until they feel ; and it may then be too late. To you, then, ye *right*, I make this forcible appeal. A teacher of Religion tells you, that vice is the cause of human misery ; that the pillars of society are tottering ; and that it is not only criminal, but egregiously foolish, in *you* to help forward the work of destruction.—Help forward, did I say ? it is *you* who have begun all this business. Unknown to yourselves, I must do you the justice to believe, you have prepared the materials, and scattered the seeds of it. Yes, it is not to be dissembled. Your vices, your follies, and your bad principles, (which, it must be confessed, you have so *disinterestedly* disseminated) have disordered the society. Yet, such is our situation, that, dreadful as the state is to which

your misgovernment has led us, it is to *you* that we must still look for deliverance: for *you* alone are culpable; indeed it be not too late, of obviating the consequences. Do it, then, while you can, before the whole is anarchy. But how do it By a simple process. Do the duties of your situations. Be the magistrates, and the patriarchs. Consider the Public as your family. Set examples of what is proper in your own persons. Call Religion to your assistance, instead of discarding it. Return to the public duties which you have deserted. Think sometimes of the God that made you. Support, by all possible means, the virtue, and the good principles of the society. Preserve the people, as far as may be, satisfied, and in good humour. Find suitable employment for them, and allow them to reap the fruits of it. We call upon Governments not to oppress the people, and upon individuals not to corrupt them.—If, notwithstanding all this, the disorderly must prevail, and the grand fabric fall, you will have the satisfaction of reflecting that you have not brought it down upon yourselves; that, to the last, you have done your duty;

and that, if you perish, you perish gloriously.—But no, if you really do your duty, it will not be. Had the state of Europe, external and internal, been what it ought, it was not a few villians, (who had no other view than to make property change hands) that could have thus convulsed it; nor could the deluded multitudes of the French have burst beyond the barriers of justice and religion, and inundated the surrounding countries.

It is very strange, that the two classes of the rich and the poor, into which society is divided, though their interests be evidently the same, have in all ages been contending. And, the worst of it is, that the contention, when it becomes serious, is not like other contentions. It goes to the very existence of the society. Whatever the one party suffers, the other suffers exactly in proportion. Destroy the poor, you annihilate the rich; annihilate the rich, you destroy the poor. Yet are these two perpetually contending. Can any thing afford a more miserable proof of the horrible quality of vice, and the weakness of the human intellect.

The most important political question which can offer itself to our discussion, is, Whose is the fault? and, what are the best means for preventing it? Religion gives the simple and the true answer. She says to both classes, do your duty: and she adds, if this be not done, it is in vain that you will search for palliatives.

Shall we once more revert to present scenes, which are not a digression, but, on the contrary, afford a striking illustration of the principle of the following volume? Amidst the convulsions, almost unparalleled in history, which now shake the world, who is so blind as not to look beyond the unconscious instruments presently in motion, to the ultimate causes? Who does not discern the dreadful explosions of vice manifesting themselves, and the arm of the Almighty punishing? Who does not see that Omnipotent arm hurling one mass of corruption against another, and dashing to pieces the kingdoms?

Yes, if I may use the language of the Scripture, the overflowing scourge has passed through. God has been visiting and cor-

recting. Vice has accumulated, and made another horrible explosion.

Terrible in all ages has been our history. Many a measure has been tried with us, many a situation have we been thrown into, and many have been our political arrangements. But, in vain. Vice acts in all situations, and all situations are successively convulsed and overthrown. Miserable governors! and people! perpetually deceiving and deceived, but always deceiving yourselves most, and ascribing, uniformly and unanimously, your miseries to every cause but the real one.

See France! miserable, unprincipled, voluptuous, corrupted France! She laughs at Religion, she renounces good morals, she steepes herself in vices, she is distinguished among the nations in infamy, she is full charged with crimes. Lo! her sky is overcast, her kingdom shakes, the volcano opens. King, nobles, priests, and philosophers, are swept down together. Their lofty, gay ranks are obliterated. They have disappeared, like a splendid vision, from the earth.—And they have given place to a set of men, if possible, still worse, whose day is coming.—But, behold, first, a crash yet

more remarkable,—France hurled against Italy! and, from Italy, rebounding upon Egypt! It is thus that the Almighty often manifests himself, and uses one set of miscreants to punish and to overwhelm another.

I feel a strong propensity to pray, that God would work a miracle,—that he would dispose us to take a lesson from the miseries we have witnessed. These might serve to convince us (at least, while we remember them) of the unknown, dangerous quality of vice. We do seem, at this moment, rather to be convinced. Some small tendencies are discovered towards what is right. Our torpor seems, at intervals, to be touched. We are beginning to discover, that marriage is necessary, and that the Sabbath is a good institution. It is also becoming fashionable to acknowledge God,—I suppose, in opposition to the French.

But, wishing to indulge the ideas which these appearances suggest, I must say, that I feel also a foreboding (which, I fear, is far more certain) that, as soon as the danger is over, (if indeed it is to be over) we will forget it, and return to our old habits. We will forget God, neglect and vilify religion, violate

moral duty, laugh at conscience, despise, and, because we may despise, disregard, and oppress our fellow-creatures.—I can then see beyond this—Oh! that I were not a prophet!—the former, perhaps worse, miseries returning.

The Author, wishing to relieve a little these melancholy scenes, begs here to mention, that, if the present volume be well received by the public, he proposes to follow it with a second.

In the meantime, he hopes that these Discourses, and the illustrations which they present to us of the good and evil quality, will contribute to obviate the ultimate and wise conclusion of the new philosophy, that there is no difference between good and evil, and that actions are equal. Nothing can shew, in a stronger light, the melancholy weakness of the human intellect, than the observation, that, in the progress of our profound enquiries, we uniformly find, that extremes meet, and that our illumination terminates in darkness.

Finally, he takes this opportunity to return thanks to his Subscribers. In better times, it would not have been necessary to resort to a subscription. But now, it is become rather unsafe to publish upon such subjects.—Before a

man print Sermons, he should know who are to read them; and it is not the least striking mark of our improvements, that we peruse a volume of Moral or Religious Discourses, almost as seldom, and with nearly the same indifference or reluctance, as we do the Bible.

Dear Sir,
I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the matter of the
land in the town of ... and in reply to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration.
I am, Sir, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
J. B. ...

SERMONS.

SERMON I.

On the QUALITY of VICE.



ROMANS, vii. 13.

That sin—might become exceeding sinful.

THAT there are qualities and powers in nature unknown to us, and which, in our present state, at least, we cannot clearly comprehend, is one of those principles which we may consider as self-evident. This world, as it is related to the universe, may be regarded literally as a prison. We are allowed, indeed, the liberty of its walls, within which we remain at large, but we cannot advance beyond them. We have limits fixed for us, as definite and precise as if they had been marked by the hand of man. Of what lies without us, therefore, and even of our affairs within, so far as they

are connected with the surrounding powers, our knowledge must necessarily be imperfect.

In the present discourse, I have selected an instance of these observations, to which I would solicit your attention, and which, I hope, will impress every reflecting man with conviction. The Apostle says, that sin is exceeding sinful. In contemplating the nature and effects of vice, he discovers plainly that he can give no just account of it; and that it possesses qualities of so pernicious a nature, that human knowledge affords neither language nor ideas by which it can be described. This proposition I shall now, in consistence with the views of the Apostle, endeavour to illustrate. Revelation, reason, and experience, hold it out as the same formidable object. They represent it as possessing a fatal malignity,—a malignity which blasts and taints, which poisons and destroys, with unseen, but certain influences, every mind, character, and situation.

And may God Almighty himself, who conducts the universal system, touch our hearts with conviction; and impress us with such a sense of the atrocity of vice, as may discover its exceeding sinfulness.

I. In the first place, that vice possesses some unknown, malignant quality, may be inferred from the observation that the consequences of it bear no proportion to our immediate sentiments concerning it. Revelation represents it as sweet in the mouth, and bitter in the belly. A man, when he commits vice, has not that idea of its atrocity which is afterwards manifested by its effects. He has some confused knowledge that he is doing a wrong thing; but still he does not view it as very pernicious, nor has, by any means, such a sense of it as to inspire him with aversion and detestation. On the contrary, it seems often to possess attractions, and has the faculty of inspiring him with complacency. It approaches him, not as a monster, but seducer; and tempts his reason, as well as passions, with views of pleasure or advantage. These are so evidently his sentiments, that they constitute the very essence of his temptation. He thinks, if it be bad, that it has a fair appearance; and regrets that a companion so agreeable should ever be less engaging. It is not, till after he has complied, that he feels disgust; it is not,

until it begins to operate in its consequences, that he perceives aversion. Vice resembles a slow, and fatal poison, which manifests itself gradually; and, from not being at first perceptible, gathers constant strength till it overpowers the system. It possesses a malignity which at first is not suspected, but is disclosed by sure degrees, and terminates in misery.

II. THAT vice possesses a malignity with which we are at present but very imperfectly acquainted, may be concluded from the activity of this quality, and the unexpected, but certain progress which it makes, wherever it has been once admitted. A man, when he is first tempted to commit vice, has no idea of the lengths to which he afterwards arrives. He may be seduced to the commission of single acts; but that he shall proceed until he throws off all restraint, and becomes a profligate, and horrid character, he has no conception. Should a friend kindly warn him against any enormous vice, and hint his apprehension that he is in danger from it, he would reply, with Hazael, " what, dost thou think

“thy servant a dog, that he should do this
“vile thing?” Yet he afterwards, and perhaps
at no great distance of time, does the very
thing he thought himself incapable of; and
then proceeds rapidly, accumulating iniquity,
until he reaches the last enormities of wickedness. We may affirm truly, that where
vice is concerned, a man has no proper idea
of himself. It is an infection which, from
the slightest taint, spreads actively throughout
the whole character.—And it exhibits the very
same progress in societies, as in individuals.
It is amazing to observe how certainly vice
spreads throughout a nation; and how totally
it corrupts, vitiates, and changes the
whole mass of people. So complete is the
process, that they are no longer the same nation.
They preserve, perhaps, the same name,
but they no longer possess the same qualities.
They not only seem different, but they are
really changed. From a state of health and
vigour, they are sunk into a state of disease
and weakness. From being wise and brave,
disinterested and active, they are immersed in
folly, indolence, and venality. From a re-

spected, and happy people, they are become contemptible, and miserable. What, then, has produced an effect so complete, and unsuspected? A very simple cause seemingly. A few vices, which were probably thought harmless, have gained admission, and fermented within the mass, until at last they have penetrated every part of it, and corrupted the whole body. To use the language of inspiration, "the whole head has become sick, and the whole heart faint." So entire is the change, that it would appear a dream, if history, and repeated experience, did not both confirm it. But whatever other reflections it may suggest, we may infer, from the whole process, the fatal activity of vice, and the unexpected, and amazing progress with which it spreads itself, wherever it is admitted, throughout societies, and individuals.

III. THAT vice possesses a malignity unknown to us, appears from the remorse which follows it, and the unaccountable terrors with which it agitates the mind. It is very remarkable, that it is only before the commis-

sion of it that it appears agreeable; and that the moment after, as if it had just thrown aside a mask, it assumes a disgustful and terrific aspect. As soon as it has gained your confidence, it stings your bosom. It is a friend who flatters you into a bad action for some purpose of his own, and then leaves you to your reflections. The moment that a man has complied with vice, he discovers that he has not been doing a service to himself. He finds that he has been over-reached, and that all those dreams of pleasure or advantage, with which his fancy had been deluded, are dispersed. Then succeeds a horrid retrospect, where every thing appears folly, and which produces nothing but repentance, and self-upbraiding. This is the common history of vice, which every man who has committed it must have experienced. Against these sentiments we have no defence, they pursue us to our retreats, and arise frequently in so terrible an aspect, that the most determined minds give way before them. It is not merely in the hour of death that they array themselves against the mind; but they haunt us in our

higheft prosperity ; when every mouth is ready to pronounce us happy, and when the whole world seems combined to favour us : It is then, when no outward cause of uneasiness can be discovered, that they destroy us within, and render our existence itself a burden. Need I adduce instances, where almost daily instances present themselves ? Behold the secret murderer, whom no man suspected, and who had laid his scheme with such address that no traces of it could be discovered. He enjoyed his prize in safety, no evidence remained, not a suspicion transpired, no man accused him. Behold he presents himself unexpectedly before the judge, pronounces himself miserable, confesses his crime, and declares that he can have no peace until he expiates it. Behold the conqueror arrives from a foreign shore, covered with glory, and satiated with immense riches. Wherever he passes, he moves in splendour, followed by the multitude, and honoured with the applause of nations. One would conclude this man happy, happy in himself, and in the approbation of all mankind. Yet, behold !

without the least visible change of fortune, amidst the honours and rewards of a whole nation, grateful for his services, he refuses to live; and turns that sword, which he had employed so successfully against the enemies of his country, upon his own breast. What, then, has overcast his bright day, and inspired him with so fatal a resolution? Is it that he has not the same value for life, or for the enjoyments of life, as others? No; but his mind is miserable, he is haunted with horrors, the cries of murdered innocents yet sound in his ears, the ravages of desolated provinces still flame before him! These obscure his splendours, they pursue him to his retreats, and drive him to desperation.—We may observe upon this head farther, that, even where a man is not driven to punish himself, but his conscience is supposed to have been lulled to rest, how often are sinners overtaken and destroyed by very surprising judgments? Is it not become proverbial, that a curse attends unjust gain? And does not an unseen hand frequently interpose, and frustrate wicked purposes? Have we not

not seen the hoards of the oppressor melt from him like the snows of his fields? Have not the houses of the proud been overturned? Is not blood paid with blood? And has not the tongue of the blasphemer been blasted amidst his blasphemies? It may give us some idea of vice, to observe, that an unseen justice pursues it; and, even when it is most triumphant, and seems most secure, interposes, and destroys it.

IV. THAT vice possesses some uncommon malignity of quality, is evident from this remarkable observation, that the consequences of it almost always reach beyond the man himself who commits it, and affect numbers of other people. We can hardly conceive an instance of vicious conduct, where this rule does not hold; and where the effects do not result from the agent upon all who are connected with him, and even upon numbers of people with whom he seems to have no connection, (but certainly, who have no connection with his crimes) and who are perhaps utterly unknown to him.—That the effects of

vice, first of all, result from the agent himself upon all connected with him, is evident to the slightest survey. The vices of every individual affect his neighbourhood, and disturb the circle, whatever it is, to which he is attached. The vices of the children affect the parents, and the vices of the parents result upon the family, and upon all who may have transactions with it. The vices of the magistrate affect the district over which he presides; the vices of the minister or sovereign affect the nation which they guide, and often pull down enormous ruin upon the community. The people profit or suffer, in all cases, from the good or bad conduct of their governors; and feel the consequences even of their personal qualities, from the centre to the extremities. No individual, even whatever he may wish to do, can confine the injury which his vices occasion to himself. The vices of parents, in particular, are, in this light, remarkable. They not only affect the external state of their families, (which we see them daily lay in ruins) but they appear literally to be transfused, and to influence the internal qualities and fu-

ture fate of their posterity. We may consider it as ascertained by experiment, that one man, if he be highly vitiated, will transmit his vices with himself, and give a colour to his posterity for ages. Nay, so certain and remarkable is this effect, that the virulence, if it be interrupted in one generation, will break out in another, and renew its ravages. This opens an extensive prospect into the rational and moral world. The conduct of every individual, even the meanest, appears, in this light, to be important, and may produce consequences of the first magnitude among the species.

V. THE same doctrine arises, and receives new force, from a general view of the world, and of its establishments. Mankind are collected every where into societies; these societies are bound by laws, and united under distinct governments. What, then, is the great object of laws, and of society itself? To protect from injury, or, in other words, to restrain vice. In collecting mankind into societies, or, as it is called, in the founding and

establishing of empires, the passions of men have been the immediate instruments ; but the great end of the whole movement, was to produce peace, order, and security. It was for this purpose that these passions were implanted,—to lead the human species into their best state, and to place them under order and good government. It is thus that men accomplish the designs of God, and that, even where they mean nothing but to serve themselves, their very worst passions are managed, and made useful in the system.—An individual state, which supposes complete freedom and self-enjoyment, is a state too perfect for our species. Government and laws, of which we boast so highly, convey in reality the most severe reflection against our nature. They suppose vice, they suppose injury, they suppose that, if we were not prevented or restrained, we would, in a short time, extinguish our own species. They inform us plainly, that we cannot be trusted with ourselves ; and that, if it were not for vice, laws, government, and society, would be unnecessary. But, waving these reflections at present, let us observe here

what a dangerous quality vice must be, how malignant and fatal in its nature, when so many barriers have been found necessary to obstruct its progress. Creation has been arrayed against it, the nations have been called out, mounds have been thrown up on all sides, the species has been assembled under numerous standards, and associations have been formed for mutual security in every quarter of the globe. To this state we have been brought, in this situation we stand at present, and it does not appear that we could even exist in any other. Who does not see, through all this, that mankind have a common enemy? And who will say that the enemy, against whom all these arrangements have been found necessary is not formidable? The different establishments of religion have the same object. All the great arrangements of the world are engaged in one arduous labour. With respect to the laws particularly, we may only observe this farther, that they arose not from the foresight of what might happen, but from the experience of what actually had happened. To those who might allege that the inconve-

niencies of vice arise from the institutions of society, we may reply, that the very reverse is true. The institutions of society arose undoubtedly from the bad consequences of vice. Even at this day, the laws are enacted successively as vice arises, and as the effects of it make them necessary.

VI. THE malignity of vice will be made manifest from a view of the effects which, notwithstanding all the precautions we can take, it has produced, and is producing daily among mankind. Notwithstanding all the barriers we have erected, and the united endeavours of religion, laws, and government, against it, it operates incessantly, and makes horrid breaches among the species. It possesses an activity which the arrangements of society have been as yet unable to surmount. The earthquakes which overturn the cities, are not more fatal than the extensive, and continued movements with which it agitates our system. No barriers avail, no defences are found sufficient. Though mankind are every where arrayed against it, yet it breaks in, and

spreads misery and destruction round it. The happiness of individuals, the peace of families, the order of society, and the harmony of nations, are swept before it. In private and public life, what disorders and distress does it accumulate? It plunges in misery, it drives to despair, it delivers up to justice. It produces want, infamy, and death. Survey the peculiar domains of vice, those spots of society which she has tainted, and conceive then, if it be possible, some idea of her malignity. What numbers of wretches, what heaps of nuisance and disease, what a mass of robberies, murders, and executions!—But the effects of it in private life, amazing as they are, fall still vastly short, both in number, and extent of mischief, of its effects in public. Here it acts upon a larger theatre, and displays itself more fully as it acts without restraint. It is a remarkable instance of the present imperfection, that though every nation has contrived rules to restrain its own subjects, no rules have been invented, nor any system formed, to prevent the nations from doing injury to one another. We have seen the ne-

cessity of the one case, but, whether it proceeds from want of will, from want of attention, or from want of power, or from all these combined, we have overlooked hitherto the much greater necessity, and more extensive, mischiefs, of the other. The consequence of this is, that the very vices which nations account infamous, and punish with death, within themselves, they commit daily, not only with impunity, but with the highest glory, against one another. The different societies of the earth, appear to be little better than so many associations who agree to spare themselves, that they may be the better enabled to disturb their neighbours. The police of the world, which we display so vainly, is in real infancy. It resembles strongly the regulations of children, adapted to the moment, and filled with inconsistencies.—But our business here is rather with the effects of this imperfect justice, as they serve to display vice, than with its causes. But for vice, we should not dispute about regulations, because they would be all unnecessary. Consider, then, how she operates, observe her dreadful ravages, when

the nations rise against one another, and when all regulation and restraint are at an end. What injustice, what rage, what desolations, what dreadful massacres, present themselves? Determined to rob, or fixed upon one another's lives, they come deliberately to the field of slaughter, and make horrid carnage. The earth and ocean are then only the theatres of human madness, and we become alternate objects of pity, and detestation.—Yet these scenes we expect duly, and prepare ourselves for them. As if there were danger that, when the time came, we would not be sufficiently expert at putting one another to death, we train ourselves to the business; and invent, and accumulate, in the intervals of peace, every means we can think of for future murder and destruction.—Nor, dreadful as the business is, have the nations been ever able to abstain from it for any time. As surely as every generation sees the light, so surely do they find a war prepared for them, or take pains to prepare it for themselves. It would seem that the world grows weary of observing justice; and that, at certain intervals, it is necessary to

release them from it. Were we to judge from what we see, we would conclude that a state of peace and order is a state of restraint, and ties mankind up from what they are naturally inclined to. But the fact is, that, in scenes like these, men are not themselves. They are first led into them by vice, and are then transported, and forget their nature. The whole business proceeds from coveting what is not our own, something perhaps of no value, or something possibly that would hurt us. Despising what we have, we always think that what we have not is better. Not contented with our own, we covet what is our neighbour's. From this cause, simple as it is, proceeds great part of the public miseries of the globe. It is not that we have not better principles, but that we act against them. We have both a sense of justice, and a love of peace. We also wish strongly to indulge them. But we are seduced by vice; and it is a proof what a malignant quality it must be, when it not only leads us to act so directly contrary to our own sentiments, but when, from such simple beginnings, it pro-

duces always such complicated, and such extensive miseries.

VII. It will complete this argument, to observe that Revelation agrees perfectly with Reason in her views of vice, and holds it out as the same malignant, and fatal enemy. The doctrine we have laid down, and the observations we have made upon this subject, will explain many strong passages, and throw new light and evidence upon the history, and scheme of scripture. Considered merely as an historical record, the scriptures are a very valuable and precious monument of antiquity. They give us a scheme of the world very different from any that are now formed; and lead us back to a period when the fortune of individuals, and revolutions of empires, were accounted for upon principles very different from those which have been adopted in our own times. Instead of representing them as the effects of human force or policy, they consider these as very inferior causes; and describe them as proceeding invariably from a higher law, the general, and great law of

merit and demerit; in other words, from the moral qualities of the agents. The scripture represents our world as depending upon a higher system, and all the events of it as determined by our connections with greater powers. The description which it gives of a very powerful, vitiated being, and of his transactions in the universe, discovers the extent of the principle; and gives a very important view of the world, and of its administration. The account, indeed, of this agency is not complete. Little more is discovered than the fact, nor does it appear that more was necessary. There is a glance, and but a glance, afforded to us of the transactions which ly without us,—just enough to shew that the law is every where the same, and that the higher and the lower natures are regulated by a common principle. Abstracting from the agents, we are informed, in general, that the universe is divided into two great contending interests, the interests of good and evil; or, as we may call them, with very great propriety, the powers of creation and destruction. On the one hand, we discover a very power-

ful influence, adverse to creation, agitating the universe in all its parts, and producing, wherever it is admitted, the most extensive misery and disorder. On the other hand, representing vice as the source of misery, scripture discovers the Supreme Being, the wise and benevolent Parent of his creation, as obstructing its progress ; extracting, in the first instance, all the good possible from it ; and, in the last, taking the strongest measures to defeat, and expel it finally from the system. This is the great object of divine government, and it will give us some idea of this quality, to observe the light in which not only human but divine wisdom views it. We may infer fairly, that it must possess a very dangerous and unknown malignity, when the Creator and Sovereign of the world has thought it of such consequence, and adopted such strong measures with respect to it.—The same system will explain fully the history of scripture punishments, as well as the reason of scripture divinity. We may observe in scripture, what we have before observed with respect to actual life, that the punishment of vice is fre-

quently not proportioned to the ideas we have of it; and that transgressions, which appear to us very simple in their own nature, are often followed by the most unexpected and dreadful vengeance.—It is very remarkable that scripture uniformly describes vice (though we frequently do not suspect it) as the real and grand cause, both of private and public misfortune. It describes it as not only continually affecting the state of individuals, but as overturning families and empires. It discovers this malignant quality pervading the whole system;—mixing with the most minute, and acting, with proportionable virulence and force, in the most important interests of the world. In its final issues, it is represented as going beyond all our ideas; and as producing, not only the wildest disorders among our species, but the most dreadful explosions in the elements, and revolutions upon the globe itself. Of this, we have one instance in the history of the deluge; and we have another held out to us in the general conflagration. The ravages of the former (however we fancy they may be accounted

for) are to be seen in every quarter of the globe; and they point us, with irresistible evidence, to the ravages, still more dreadful, which are predicted to us, of the latter.—The same observation may be applied to the scheme of scripture, which has vice for its sole object, and which represents the whole powers of creation as employed about it. The great doctrine of revelation is, that the consequences of vice, extensive, and frequently unexpected, and dreadful as they are, do not terminate in this state, but that they even reach into a future.—Upon the same principle, scripture makes another very remarkable communication, or rather states a fact, which nothing but the light of revelation could have discovered to us, That sin is the cause of death.—It is equally descriptive of the influence of vice (remarkable as, we have observed, it is) upon posterity. It represents the Almighty as “visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation of them that hate him.” It distinguishes different races, speaks of a wicked race, and of an evil seed, of the sons of

God and the daughters of men, and discourages,—in some cases expressly forbids, their intermixture.—Last of all, this doctrine explains also the very strong language which the Supreme Being himself always uses when he speaks of this quality. He represents it as rebellion, and apostacy; as spreading fatally throughout the mass; as making “the whole head sick, and the whole heart faint.” To shew its indelible quality, he asks, if “the Ethiopian can change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” Then, says he, “may ye also do good that are accustomed to do evil.” He describes himself as “hating iniquity with a perfect hatred, as of purer eyes than to behold it;” and declares “that folly shall not dwell with him, nor fools stand before him.” He compares the wicked and the righteous to the chaff and the grain; the one the useless, and the other the good part of the creation; the one proper to be preserved, and the other fit for nothing but destruction. In describing the issues of vice, and last miseries of the vicious, (glancing particularly, as it is probable, at the last dreadful conflagration)

he employs all those ideas which are most terrible to the human feelings. They are figured to us by the indignation and the wrath, the tribulation and the anguish, the horrors of darkness and of flame, the rage of the most dreadful elements, and wildest distraction of the passions. We read of a worm which never dieth, of a fire which is never quenched, of utter darkness, of a bottomless pit, of the absence of hope, of weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. These are strong expressions, especially when we consider them as used by God; but are accounted for perfectly from the idea we have endeavoured to give of vice; that unknown and dangerous malignity, which it possesses, and the unwearied and fatal energy with which it operates throughout creation.

Thus I have endeavoured to illustrate a very important proposition, "That sin is exceeding sinful;" that it possesses an unknown malignity, which spreads fatally in the system; and produces, even from the simplest beginnings, the most extensive and amazing consequences. I shall now conclude this sub-

ject with a short address, arising natively from the very important materials which we have before us.

To the curious enquirers into nature, and observers of human life, a very remarkable appearance has always presented itself. While they wish to reduce every thing to the class of causes and effects, something is continually arising before them which they can assign to neither. Ignorant of the laws by which it is governed, they call it fate, or irresistible destiny. While all human events fluctuate, they perceive this to be steady and eternal. Individual exertions may sometimes shock, but cannot set it finally aside. It returns with accumulated force, and bears along the weak efforts of men. This grand law (which no person has yet explained), has manifested itself unequivocally in all the ages, and among all the nations of the earth. Among all nations, too, the appearances and sense of it have been the same; and, while philosophy pretends to account for all things, it has always been the opprobrium of philosophy.—For my own part, without assuming (what is not

easy) more wisdom than others have done before me, I shall content myself, Christians, with calling your attention to a higher order of causes than philosophy generally resorts to. If you have attended to the foregoing illustrations, and been seriously impressed with them, you will be convinced, that, whatever influence we may ascribe to what are called secondary causes, there are causes still more general; that they govern ultimately the events of the world and the fortunes of men; and that, when we leave these out of our calculations, or make not a proper estimate of their force, it is not wonderful that we should continually meet with unaccountable appearances.—Come, then, Christians! and let us review and apply this interesting subject together. I have endeavoured, without the vain affectation of philosophy, to illustrate one great law of our species and of the world. I have displayed before you a very amazing appearance, which perhaps many of you have not before observed; or, at least, have not considered with that attention which it merits. The scripture, in allusion to vice, says, that a “little leaven leaveneth the whole

“lump.” Words were never more true, nor more descriptive. Vice, however small in its beginnings, spreads surely throughout the mass, and reduces it to a heap of corruption. Let a particle of it be lodged within, such is its active quality, that, if it be not expelled instantly, it penetrates every part, and vitiates the whole subject. Progressive in its nature, it proceeds from bad to worse; malignant in its quality, it produces the most unexpected and dreadful consequences. It resembles those subtle poisons, which not only distort, but change the fabric. No two things are more different than good and evil, nor can any two species of beings be farther removed from one another than a man who possesses his innocence, and the same man, after he has been vitiated by bad habits. What is equally remarkable, the consequences of vice do not terminate in a man himself. The malignity of this quality acts upon all around it; and transmits itself, in different forms, even to posterity. A vitiated man is, first of all, offensive to those about him; and, in the next place, conveys generally a part of the evil with which he was

curfed himself to his own offspring. "That
" the iniquities of the fathers shall be visited
" upon the children," is not so much a threat-
ening, as a prediction, of the actual and ne-
cessary effects of vice. The virulence of this
quality is such, that it cannot spend its force
upon a man himself. The unhappy father be-
gets unhappy children ; and, though he should
have nothing else to leave them, he bequeaths
one sure portion, which he cannot devise away
from them, the effects of his vices. Vice, in-
deed, generally leaves him little to give ; but
he gives at least part of what he has. He
gives them a part of his vices, a part of his
bad health, a part even of his bad name, and
the whole wants and distresses which his bad
habits have brought upon him. All these
are sure inheritances which his representatives
feel when he is gone, and of which they can-
not easily be defrauded. He not only conveys
them to his immediate offspring, but, which
is equally amazing, he entails them in his fa-
mily ; and transmits the estate, accumulated,
through all the possible generations of his suc-
cessors, till the line expires under it, and his

name and vices go out together. Till this moment the virulence is not spent, it acts until it destroys, and is not extinguished but with the last remnant of the line which it adheres to, —Do not, then, Christians! do not think lightly of vice. Think not lightly of any vice, however slight it may appear. Remember, that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump. Touch it not, it is a poison, and the least particle of it will infect you. Fly from it, touch it not, for it will infect your children. Look not at the vice itself, but at its consequences. The vice perhaps is fair, it seems innocent, yet fly from it, do not breathe upon it, for its effects are dreadful. Pleasant perhaps in the mouth, you no sooner have received it than it inflicts infernal pains, and produces miseries which cease not with your own being. Ah! what a curse it must be! how must it embitter a man's dying moments, to think that he has cursed his offspring!—that he has left them his wants, his vices, his diseases, and his infamy? This is a second death, more terrible, if possible, than the first. It is hell itself, thrust into the breast, and suffocating the re-

fections.—That vices, as well as the diseases, which arise from them, are conveyed in blood, there can be little doubt of. Why speculate about it? It is a piece of natural knowledge, which should have the effect to make us cautious. Vice is a disease itself, a virulent disease, which ferments and poisons the whole subject, while a single particle remains for it to act upon.—And it exhibits the same process, and repeats it without end, in nations, as in individuals. Here, indeed, the law is, if possible, more manifest, for the effects are accumulated. Individuals may afford exceptions, but among nations there can be none. A celebrated writer, who deals largely in general maxims, observes, “that virtue is the “principle of a republic.” This seems to imply, that other governments may be maintained without it. There is a deficiency here (where we would not expect it) of generalizing. The maxim, in this limited sense, though it may be, as, I dare to say, it often has been, consolatory to statesmen, is mischievous and false. Virtue is equally the principle of every government. Remove this, and

the fabric drops. Introduce vice, and the nation is at an end *. To this rule there is not a single exception in history. Vice acts uniformly; and, if it be not interrupted, or repelled, gives always the same results. From the simplest beginnings, it produces invariably the most extensive miseries. This is it's native character, in every possible situation. It resembles strongly that infernal substance which has so often been made its instrument. Lodge but a few particles, put them in motion, give them but life, and they will expand themselves until they fill the globe. The most solid empires have been shaken by it successively, and exploded from their foundations, till not a trace of them remained.—Nor is this dangerous quality confined, by any means, to our globe. It acts upon a vaster theatre, it divides the universe, and convulses it in all its parts. Revelation discovers it continuing its explosions, and manifesting itself, with accumulated horrors, in other worlds. Our world only follows a

* This is so true, that *virtue*, if it can but be maintained, will support a nation under *any* form of government.

higher system, and subsists amidst the contention of greater powers. There is probably as strict a connection, though we cannot trace it, between moral and natural evil, throughout the whole system, as we observe with respect to man. Earthquakes, hurricanes, and inundations, have probably the same connection with vice as the diseases of the human body.—We are told that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Good and evil are the two interests which divide the universe. How important their contention is, we may conceive from this piece of revealed history; where we see a single, frail individual of our feeble species an object of such attention.—The whole question with respect to *us* is, which of these interests we will embrace. Nor is the question difficult. To ask whether we will be good or evil, is asking, in other words, whether we will be happy or miserable. We describe only a natural process, when we say that religion prepares us for the one state; and (let us remember) that vice vitiates, subverts, corrupts, and renders us at last fit for nothing but the other.

SERMON II.

On the QUALITY of VIRTUE.



PROVERBS, iii. 15.

She is more precious than rubies.

THAT we are yet in the infancy of our knowledge, there are innumerable reasons to convince us. Placed amidst an immense system, all we can say is, that we observe some appearances; but without being able, almost in any case, to assign the causes of any one appearance which we contemplate. We are in the same situation with respect to our own faculties. We know as little about ourselves as we do about the world in which we are placed. It is in vain that metaphysicians have attempted to describe the mind. No science produces less fruit than theirs. There is hard-

ly one of their principles from which we may not draw opposite conclusions ; and the result of what they are pleased to call their profound reasonings, seems to be, that one thing is as probable as another.

Amidst this palpable darkness of our state, is it a wonder that our knowledge of the moral qualities of actions should be imperfect ? We know in general that vice is hurtful, and that virtue is beneficial. We have also some gleams of their agreeable, and disagreeable effects upon the mind. But the extent of their agreeable or disagreeable, of their hurtful, or their beneficial qualities ; and the numerous, and amazing issues in which they terminate ; we are only beginning to contemplate. This is a knowledge which we are still endeavouring to learn. The supreme Being has made such arrangements, and speaks in such strong terms with respect to these qualities, that the student of revelation can have no doubt that they are of an importance and extent of which we have at present no just conception. Meditation and experience more and more confirm this doctrine.

In a former discourse, I treated of the quality of Vice. I endeavoured to shew, from a copious induction of effects and circumstances, that it possesses some fatal malignity, which is at present but imperfectly known to us, but which is continually manifesting itself throughout the creation. I shall now treat the counterpart of that proposition. I shall examine the quality of Virtue. In the present chapter, and indeed throughout the Scriptures, the Divine Spirit speaks of it in such terms as may convince us that our ideas of it are equally imperfect. The wise man here traces it throughout the system; and remarks, in the wide circle of the heavens and of the earth, its precious and beneficial effects. He examines it as operating upon the earth, and producing, wherever it makes its appearance, universal happiness among men. He then ascends to the larger theatre of the heavens, and gives us the glorious view of it, as operating with the Creator in producing his magnificent works, and as continually uniting them to himself. From these views he concludes its value; and affirms that it ought to be pre-

ferred to the most precious treasures, and that there is nothing we know, or can conceive, which may be compared with it. His language, in describing it, rises to an uncommon splendour, and force. "Length of days," says he, "is in her right hand, and in her left hand " riches and honour. Her ways are ways of " pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. " She is life to the soul, and grace to the neck. " She is a tree of life to them that lay hold " upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her. The Lord by her hath founded the earth, and established the heavens. " By her the depths are broken up, and the " clouds drop down the dew. Her merchandize is better than the merchandize of silver, " and the gain of her than fine gold. She is," says he, in my text, " more precious than rubies, and all the things thou canst desire are " not to be compared unto her."—The words, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, which are used in these verses, I have no difficulty to translate Virtue. This is evidently their meaning in this passage, and generally throughout this book. But, of this, were there any

doubt, there are numerous other passages in the Scriptures which confirm this interpretation, and where the same high effects are unequivocally ascribed to it.

In discoursing, therefore, upon this subject, it shall be my object to illustrate this important doctrine. I shall endeavour, from an induction of effects and circumstances, to shew that virtue is a precious quality, that it possesses a value of which we have at present no full conception, but which manifests itself, in the most uniform and continued manner, throughout the creation. This proposition is established by the history both of individuals, and of societies.

First of all, that virtue is a precious quality, that it possesses a value of which we have at present no full conception, appears from the wonderful effects which it produces upon the mind. These effects are not easy to be described, but they are evidently surprising. We shall gather them first from scripture, and then compare them with our experiences. The descriptions of them in the scripture intimate their high nature and extent, by shew-

ing the weakness of human language to appreciate them. The quality of virtue is described as rendering a man glorious within. The comparison is taken from the change which is produced upon the appearance of the material world by the approach of the light, which disperses the darkness, and embellishes all nature. To the deadness of the night, succeed the most glorious colours, and the most picturesque appearances of things. No change can be more perfect, or more surprising.—But nothing shews the weakness of language more to appreciate these precious effects, than another of the scripture comparisons. It assimilates the change, which this quality produces upon the man, to the idea, which is scarcely conceivable, of a new birth. The completeness of the effect cannot be otherwise conceived than by supposing the man to be born again, and to be, in fact, a new man. But we shall condescend to instances, and illustrate this doctrine by our experience.

I. IN the first place, then, that Virtue possesses some unknown preciousness of quality,

may be inferred from the observation that the effects of it, any more than the effects of vice, bear no proportion to our immediate sentiments concerning it. A man, when he does well, does what he thinks a right thing, and is pleased with himself. It is true, the pleasure is not always pure. In doing the right, we have often difficulties to surmount, and sacrifices to make, which cost us much, and produce an internal struggle in our sentiments. Still, however, there is a pleasure, and, we may even affirm, that it is a pleasure of so exquisite and peculiar a nature, that no other sentiment can be assimilated to it. But the most wonderful part of the effect remains, an effect which nothing but our experience could lead us to expect, and which, with respect to all present appearances, is unaccountable. Pleased as a man is with himself in the doing of a right action, when it is done, he dismisses it. Whatever may have been his struggles or his enjoyments, he passes to other scenes, and thinks no more of it. He has not the least idea that, after a lapse of years, it is to meet him again; that it is then to arise to him with

redoubled satisfaction ; and that a deed, which he scarcely thought of at the time, is to form the principal solace of his life, and to be his support in the most difficult situations. That this, however, is the history of virtuous actions, is confirmed by the whole experience of mankind. Let the fallen statesman inform us what it is which supports his mind in his retirements, when divested of his honours, and cast forth to banishment and disgrace. Is it the recollection of his wars and treaties, or of the succession of his business, or intrigues ? No, these, when they approach him in their naked state, can afford but little satisfaction to his mind. They are the history generally of his falsehood and injustice, of the robberies and murders of his administration. At best they appear frivolous, and unworthy of the agitations which they occasioned. But if, amidst the multitude of his transactions, one real good deed arises to him, it illuminates the gloom, and gives a serenity to the troubles of his condition. This he immediately embraces, he wishes to forget the rest, and would cling to this for ever. He marks it as

his treasure, to which he repairs for comfort when his mind is unpleasant, and which soothes him amidst his recollections.—But why should we trace these precious influences in extraordinary cases, or uncommon situations of life? Let the man full of years and experience, not the man who comes to us from the confusions of public life, but the peaceful, private citizen, who has grown old amidst the honours of his society, tell us what it is which gilds the evening of his life, and, amidst the infirmities of his state, gives him that inexpressible look of satisfaction. Ah! it is not to be described, but it is the remembrance of his better days which passes before his mind, the active virtues of his youth, which he now traces in their effects, and in the situation of his family and connections. He joins issue with the experience of the monarch, and understands the full force of the observation, “that the righteous shall inherit the earth, and that the seed of the upright shall be blessed.” He comprehends what it is to cast his bread upon the waters, and to find it again after many days. He is

ready to explain it to his descendants, and to inculcate it upon the unexperienced of his generation. He can inform them, if they will listen to him, of wonders which they suspect not, and deduce the most extensive and admirable effects, from causes to which they had not attended. Joining, as he now can, principles to their issues, he is agreeably surpris'd at the connection; and is not more delighted in reflecting upon his own conduct, than in contemplating the unexpected magnitude of the good consequences which have arisen from it. He recollects, and finds verified in himself, the admirable observation, "that he that goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." He remembers that his first beginnings were small, and his circumstances discouraging. The world seem'd to offer nothing to him but adversity, and he soon found himself entangled in scenes of difficulty and distress. He went forth, therefore, weeping; but he carried seeds with him whose

value he did not know. They were the precious seeds of the virtues, of industry, of prudence, of justice, and of sobriety. He began early to sow them, he cultivated them in silence, and had patience to attend the issue. At first they did not promise much, but they multiplied progressively; till at last the process became rapid, and the produce accumulated and amazing. He is now returning from the field rejoicing, wondering within himself, and bringing his sheaves with him. He shews them to the youth, bids them observe his harvest, and exhorts them to imitate his example. The quality of virtue is of the most admirable nature, and produces the most unexpected effects. Like the rivers which sink into the earth, and rise again at a remote distance, it meets a man after many days, and appears to him when he is not expecting it. It has the effect which is ascribed to an enchantment, which, from causes seemingly minute and inadequate, raises golden palaces, delicious gardens, inexhaustible treasures, and a whole paradise of enjoyments around us.

II. THAT virtue possesses a precious quality, a quality which we comprehend but imperfectly, may be apprehended from observing the complete change which it produces upon the human character itself. It gives the human being all the value which he can possess. We may observe, that whatever is valuable or respectable in a man, even in a bad man, proceeds from some virtue. The character, even of bad men, is mixed ; for, if it were wholly bad, they would be completely contemptible and miserable. Any respect, or even outward comfort, which they possess, arises from some virtue which is intermixed with them, or which has been exercised by some of their progenitors. As long as this remains unspent, and in proportion to the stock of it which they hold, it beams comfort or respect upon their condition.—But it not only gilds, if I may so express myself, the condition of the wicked, but gives the best men all their value. We may observe, that the operation of virtue is not so rapid as that of vice ; but, if continued, is no less certain. It resembles, in a very near degree, the polishing of material

bodies. It is easy to cut down and destroy them; but to treat them with the view to an effect, to give them their value, and bring forth their beauties, requires time and perseverance. Continue, however, the operation, and the effect is not more certain than surprising. As the agreeable Roman writer expresses it, we find that the work even surpasses the materials. Could we expect, if experience did not teach it to us, that a block of wood, or unsightly mass of stone, could, by the perseverance of the artist, undergo so complete a change, as, from among the rubbish and rude fragments of the earth, to be lifted to public admiration, and lodged amidst the magnificence of a palace? The same effect, which surprises us in inanimate nature, appears again among intelligent, living beings. What the patient labour of the artist effects upon the block, education, or the forming of the mind, produces upon the human being. It exhibits, in every respect, a change as complete and as astonishing. It brings the man out of the savage, creates a character, and, from a state of neglect and degradation, ad-

vances him into the light, and gives him use, value, and importance.

III. THAT Virtue possesses an unknown preciousness of quality, may be concluded, from the wonderful power which it possesses of communicating immediate happiness to the mind. We are, comparatively speaking, so much with ourselves, that it is of the highest consequence to us, that we be well with ourselves. The transactions or characters without us are at a distance, or we can withdraw ourselves from them. But the world within, the multitude of our feelings and reflections, we are continually conversant with. With these we live, and we cannot, even though we were to endeavour to do it, seclude ourselves from them. Every wise man, therefore, so far as he knows his own interest, will make it the great object of his life, to be satisfied with his own actions, and with himself. But it is Virtue, and nothing else, which possesses this wonderful power, and gives us that internal satisfaction upon which our peace and happiness depend. The feeling from

which this important result arises, is simple—the feeling of being right. This is a feeling from which we would not expect much. It is obvious, one would think slight, in itself; but, in its operation and effect, wonderful. It is, in fact, the great agent of the rational system; which manages and disposes of our transactions. It is a feeling of that importance, that, though we possessed all other possible advantages, all outward comfort, or internal gifts of mind, yet, wanting this single ingredient, we would be miserable. On the other hand, though we were divested of all other advantages, all outward comforts of life or reputation, the gifts of fortune, or splendour of abilities, though we were beset by adversity, or cast forth to death or to disgrace, yet the feeling of virtue, the simple reflection of having acted well, would support our minds, and make us happy amidst our misfortunes. Need I direct you to instances, where they are so numerous, and obvious? You have only to look back upon history, (we may refer you to any history, and it makes no difference in what cause), and con-

Consider the multitudes who have suffered or died for their virtue, or their principles. You will see instances innumerable, the same experiments made, and the same cases repeatedly offered to your view, of men—divested of every outward comfort, stripped of their possessions, deserted by their friends, driven from their habitations, persecuted, imprisoned, tortured, and put to death, having nothing to support them but their virtue, the simple impression of their being right,—yet deriving from this wonderful feeling such complete happiness of mind, as they would not exchange for the most splendid offers, or most envied situations of their persecutors. You will observe, what is still more wonderful, that this feeling, simple as it is, effects what men find utterly impracticable—sublimes the low, and converts the feeble and the weak into characters the most splendid and heroic. We may affirm that the man is changed,—in the stile of the scripture, that he is born again. He is, in fact, a new fabric, and is become a new creature.—The same feeling, which changes the quality, and renders us equal to the most dif-

ficult undertakings; the same wonderful principle which brings us forward in emergencies, which supports us in the flames, and makes us great amidst the horrors of death, acts continually in common life, and is incessantly discovering itself in the multitude of our ordinary transactions. From the more difficult situations of life, we trace it in the mass of the people, as forming, upon all occasions, the great distinction of their characters and transactions. In every situation, the man who has right upon his side may be distinguished. The feeling, wherever it lodges itself, breathes fortitude and comfort round it. It is that principle which, amidst all the evils of life, renders the great bulk of mankind satisfied with their condition. Whatever may be their labours, or whatever difficulties they may have to contend with, when they can reflect that they are acting right, they are happy. This forms the great fund of internal health and force which enables us to act; and which carries us safely and happily through life. It resembles the medicine which applies immediately to pain, and which comforts the con-

situation. It possesses also another precious property, that it is subject to no foreign influence or controul. It is an independent power within us, which no outward force can reach, and which is not even affected by our own will. It follows one invariable law, that it results from well-doing, and is independent of all other causes. We can neither be pleased with ourselves, nor others, as we choose. The feeling, simple but important, is not in our command. We cannot force ourselves to esteem even our own characters. We may be wretched in spite of ourselves, and happy though the whole world were combined against us.—It is also a fund not to be exhausted. Like the stock of the widow, it multiplies by being used, and becomes at last invincible. I advance it, not as a matter of conjecture, but experiment, (and it is a wonderful experiment), that, by cultivating the moral feeling, we may so far encrease its force and effect, as to derive the most complete happiness from it alone, and render ourselves independent of all other causes. Such is the force of that unknown principle which regu-

lates the great rational system. It is the secret, but great agent of Providence, which operates incessantly, mixing itself with all our transactions, restoring our active powers, and dispensing salutary influences to our condition.

IV. THAT virtue possesses a precious influence, an influence we comprehend but imperfectly, appears from this remarkable effect, that it reaches beyond the agent himself, and affects all who stand in connection with him, and even frequently numbers of people with whom he seems to have no connection, (but certainly who have no connection with his virtues) and who are perhaps utterly unknown to him. Of this effect, remarkable as it is, we can have no doubt, for it manifests itself uniformly, and conspicuously, in the whole characters and transactions of actual life. We see every day instances of multitudes depending upon one, and affected, in the most material manner, by his conduct. The children are affected by the parent, the people by the magistrate, and the nation by the minister.

This rule holds both with respect to virtue and vice. In proportion also to a man's sphere of action, are exactly the influences of his conduct. In a small sphere, these influences are visible; but in a larger one they are not less certain. The virtues of parents, in particular, in the same manner as we have observed of their vices, are, in this light, remarkable. They not only affect the external state of their families, (which we see them daily raise to splendour) but the quality appears literally to be transfused, and to influence the internal character, and future fate of their posterity. We may consider it as ascertained by experiment, that one man, if he be eminently virtuous, will transmit his virtues with himself, and continue long to give a colour to his posterity. The good seed (though it may be interrupted) will continue to discover itself, and the stock to be distinguished. This is the case of the virtuous, equally as of the vicious quality; and forms (as we may every day remark) a very prominent difference among the races of men. Here again a most extensive and wonderful prospect into

the rational and moral world opens to us. The virtue of every individual, even the meanest, appears, in this light, to be important; and, amidst the changes which successively affect the world, may, at one period or another, produce consequences of the first magnitude.—But, independent of this speculation, what is not so much observed, the virtues of an individual form frequently a stock which is not easily spent, and which often preserves its force, and is observed to operate, even under multiplied disadvantages. This is so true, that nothing is more common among us, than for men to feel the beneficial effects of virtues which were practised many hundred years ago. These effects remain, and are transmitted, even amidst the numerous obstacles which are continually arising around them. We may instance in the inheritances of families, and the national prosperity of kingdoms. The inheritance, or stock, which virtue first accumulated, we see transmitted through numerous generations. The influences of his virtues not only affect the agent and his imme-

diate offspring, but often reach far beyond them, and are felt by a posterity who never saw, and can hardly conceive their obligation to them. The original virtue operates through ages, and the influences of it are so strong, that it requires no common industry to defeat them.—The same effects, but still more extensive, are produced in cities, and in nations. The virtues of a good magistrate will be long felt throughout a community. The laws which the public spirit of a great minister suggests, will operate for ages, and render a whole nation flourishing and prosperous. The exertions of a few men of eminent virtue, will raise a fabric of national greatness and force, which it will require ages of time, and even of bad conduct, to destroy. In short, if we examine this question, we will find that the happiness of our state depends upon the virtues of others, as well as upon our own; that we are benefited by men whom we never saw; and that the effects of their conduct are transferred to us.

Here it is impossible not to observe a fact, which presses itself upon our attention,—the

exact correspondence between the system under which we actually live, and the system which revelation manifests to us. It is repeatedly inculcated in the scriptures, and supported by examples, that multitudes may be benefited by a few, and that the virtues, even of one man, may save a nation. The scriptures discover expressly this principle in the system, and represent it as one great law of the Supreme Government under which we live. Nothing can be a stronger proof of the precious influences of the virtues, and of the value which the Supreme Being places upon them, than the repeated examples, as well as declarations, of this sort, which he has given us. He declares, that he will spare Sodom, if but ten righteous persons could be found in it. He affirms the same thing, in still stronger terms, of Jerusalem. When he destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow. He blessed the family of Laban for the sake of Jacob, and the family of Potiphar the Egyptian for the sake of Joseph. It was on account of the virtues of their fathers, espe-

cially of Abraham, that he distinguished the Israelites, and made them a great and flourishing nation. For the sake of his servant David, he spared the same nation after they had repeatedly provoked him by their vices, and continued long to avert their destruction. In like manner, the virtues of Jehoshaphat, of Hezekiah, and of Josiah, were the means of averting the divine judgments, and of procuring many eminent national advantages. The same system discovers itself in many other passages of the scriptures. The seed of the upright (observe the influence on posterity) are represented as blessed. Men of distinguished virtue, are called the pillars of the land, which uphold and establish the society. They are represented as standing in the breach, and as forming the great national security. The prayers and intercessions of the righteous are affirmed to avail with God, and to avert his judgments. Where eminent virtue is found, the influences of it are described as grateful, and God himself is said to smell a sweet savour. It is represented as resembling an odour, widely diffused; which operates

within a certain sphere, and which pleases and refreshes multitudes.—These notices are continued farther, and illustrated, indeed in a very remarkable manner, under the dispensation of Christianity. Here we find the doctrine fully manifested, and stated as a religious principle. We may form some idea of the unknown preciousness of virtue, and of its salutary influences, when we see the Supreme Parent regarding a whole species with complacency, on account of the precious virtues and the perfect character of Christ. In short, experience and revelation concur to shew, that our present knowledge is imperfect; that Vice possesses a malignity, and Virtue a preciousness of Quality, of which we have no full conception; that we live under a system which is but in part known; and that there are yet great things which remain to be disclosed to us.

V. THAT Virtue possesses a precious quality, a quality we comprehend but imperfectly, appears from the unexpected and amazing changes which it produces upon the great societies of the earth. It is, in fact, the great

principle of national happiness and civilization. Whatever exalts, adorns, or renders the human species comfortable or safe, arises from it.—The discipline of the species is carried on by the three great institutes of laws, government, and religion. We may conceive what human nature would be without these, and we see how respectable it may be made by them. But the whole extensive benefits which these confer, arise from virtue, and from the support which they are calculated to give to it. In proportion as they are calculated to form the virtue of the society, or otherwise, is the exact stock of advantages which they bring to it. Here, where these circumstances are favourable to it, we see this principle operating in a wonderful manner, and producing an unexpected and prodigious result. For instance, the object of laws is justice. From this simple virtue, where it is effectually protected, what beneficial and prodigious effects flow? Establish justice, you give security to property; protect property, you awaken industry; and put the whole citizens upon exerting themselves. From hence

proceed immediately agriculture, manufactures, commerce, the whole opulence and comfort of the society.—In like manner, the object of government is the happiness of the whole people. This is the only legitimate and virtuous principle of it; and, wherever this is its principle, and where this principle is steadily pursued, the good effects are amazing.—The same rule applies to religion. Where it has for its object the virtue and comfort of the society; where its principles respect these, and where these principles are steadily believed, and uniformly inculcated and acted upon, the benefits of it are immense. We may refer any body, who doubts this, to the first ages of Christianity, where we may see a pure and happy society, existing in the midst of an Empire, corrupted and declining to barbarism. In short, whatever state of comfort or respect human society can attain, proceeds from the virtuous principle, and depends upon it. In like manner, reverse the principle, and you immediately reverse the effects. Suppose a nation, where justice is insecure, or a government,

which regards not the good of the people, with a religion perverted to bad purposes, and you cannot conceive any combination of circumstances which will bestow prosperity, respect, or comfort, upon such a society.

Hence we may observe the amazing difference which has taken place, in all ages, among the societies of the earth; how few of them have produced the effects intended; and hence also the continual tendency which even the best of them discover to degeneracy. We may observe vice every where forcing men into societies, and the same principle continually at work to reverse them. Men feel every moment the necessity of submitting to regulations; but their bad passions either prevent them originally from making these regulations what they ought to be, or prompt them to break, or evade them, after they are made. Wherever men have power, they either make, or interpret, the regulations of the society in their own favour;—that is, in favour of their own bad passions. Hence the small number of well ordered states, and hence the certain relapse even of the best ordered

into confusion. From the prosperity, however, and splendour to which that small number have arisen during the short period of their purity; and from the magnificent remains which they have long continued to exhibit, even during their decline; we may infer the preciousness of the virtuous quality, and form some idea of what it might effect. Amidst the multitude of barbarous nations which the earth at all times contains, wherever a well regulated society has appeared, what a contrast has it exhibited? And while mankind around were in a state of misery and degradation, to what a height of comfort, magnificence and respect, has it raised its citizens, and human nature?

Let me here repeat an observation which we formerly touched upon, and which has offered itself uniformly in all the views which we have taken of this subject. It may give us some idea of the unknown, wonderful agency of the virtuous principle, and the preciousness of its quality, to remark, that the whole prodigious effects we have described, bear no proportion to the causes which ap-

pear to produce them. The causes which we see are inadequate to the final result. There is some important connection wanting, which falls not within our present observation. This remark is continually manifesting itself, both in individuals and in societies. With respect to individuals, besides all that we formerly observed, there is this farther remarkable, that none of the virtues is solitary. Every single virtue, where it is cultivated, produces a multitude of other virtues, and a multitude of unexpected collateral good effects. Plant any one of the virtues in the heart, it attracts from all sides whatever is good to it;—spreading gradually their united influences throughout the character, meliorating, and finally changing the whole man.—As the sphere of action enlarges, the effects multiply. The virtues of different persons unite. Their influences accumulate. They act and re-act upon each other, until there is literally no calculating the result. This is felt, and manifests itself unequivocally in the great societies of the earth. The effects of any one virtue here are prodigious;—the disproportion

tion of the cause to the effect striking. We have already mentioned *justice*. The allowing every man to have his own, seems to be a simple business, from which we would not expect any great effects. Yet from this simple virtue flows the whole external prosperity of nations:—their wealth, their power, their populousness, their civilization; their advances in all the necessary, as well as liberal arts of life; their trade, commerce, agriculture, and manufactures; even their literature, science, and government, with all their numerous consequences and dependencies. In short, the whole complicated and vast machine of society turns upon this virtue. While you maintain this, you preserve the machine in force, and assure all its complicated movements and effects. The moment you derange it, you infallibly derange, and stop the whole system. Mankind are so sensible of the fact, though they cannot explain it, that the maintaining of this simple principle is made the pretence for all their divisions, and is the professed object of all their governments and laws. —It is the same case with all the other virtues.

Establish any one of them, you produce the same effects, and find at last the same amazing result. We have established justice in preference to the rest, merely because it is easier ascertained, but not by any means because it is preferable in itself. The other virtues go all to the same end; and, could we give them the same establishment, would make the society equally illustrious. Take, for instance, *brotherly love*, or the love of our species. Conceive it established universally, in a family, in a nation, or, finally, among the whole nations of the earth. You cannot conceive this, without immediately conceiving at the same time the whole face of human affairs to be changed, and the whole system of mankind reversed. It would, for instance, put an end to wars. The effects of this single improvement would be immense, and would be felt immediately throughout all the numerous departments of human societies. It would do much more, for it would make men assist one another wherever there was need of assistance. Whoever has reflected upon the amazing effect of a union of force, may con-

ceive to himself something, and but something, of the almost infinite result—where the whole powers of the human species throughout the earth would be combined, and acting together. This is the state which we believe is to take place in the end of time. The Prophet Isaiah, looking to the issue of things, and contemplating the final improvement of the system and of the species, indulges this magnificent idea. He conceives the earth converted into a paradise, by the establishment of a perfect and universal union:—Nature renovated,—all things reversed;—in the scripture language, old things done away, and all things become new,—the creatures universally happy, and God beholding them with complacency. In short, in whatever view we consider this subject, the powers of virtue appear to us inconceivable. As the eye loses itself on all sides in the horizon, the influences of it continually extend beyond our sight, and carry us into boundless regions, and into another system of things.

I have now finished this argument. I have endeavoured, as far as our imperfect know-

ledge will permit, to illustrate a very important proposition. If the observations we have now brought together be well founded, we may conclude from them with certainty, that virtue is a precious quality, that it possesses a value of which we have at present no full conception, but which manifests itself in the most uniform manner, throughout the creation. In the language of inspired wisdom, "it is more precious than rubies, and all the things we can desire are not to be compared unto her." And how, indeed, can it be otherwise, when this quality appears to be the mighty agent which produces, by the most wonderful and inexplicable means, the whole stock of comfort, happiness, and respect, which we can enjoy ;—which embellish created nature, and render the vast universe delightful, —making it happy within itself, and delightful in the eyes of the Creator. I shall, therefore, now conclude with attempting some improvement, and making some application of the important result.

Why mankind do not more generally follow their true interest, is a question which has

agitated and surprised themselves in all ages. One reason, no doubt, is, that, in a state where we know so little, we have no clear ideas of it. If we had, for instance, a clear comprehension of vice and virtue, the two agents which work upon the universe, and produce all the changes which take place in it; if we could discern vice in all its malignity, and virtue in all its precious influences; and could attain a steady, clear and full view of them, as continually preserving and improving, or vitiating and destroying, the system in which they exist; we would not so readily, or blindly, mistake our party. But we have no such view, or, when we have, we soon lose it. We see nothing but the appearances before us, which are deceitful. We cannot for a moment lift the veil which conceals the real actors. We cherish, therefore, without suspicion, our greatest enemy in our bosom; and give our assistance, without intending it, to that unknown malignity which pervades the system, and is continually at work in vitiating and destroying our own happiness.

Here, then, Christians, let me call upon you to consider the argument which I have suggested, and, if possible, to adopt and act upon it. In other words, let me call upon you to look beyond the appearances of the moment, and to study and know your real interest, and your own natural and best connections. The foulness and malignity of vice are not more conspicuous than the preciousness and beneficial influences of virtue. As the one is the source of all the evil and misery, so the other is as certainly the source of whatever is great, good, and beautiful in the universe. The agency, indeed, of both, is mysterious, but it is certain; and the result, in both cases, unexpected and prodigious. In a subject of such magnitude and import, (confessedly the first) we cannot take too much interest. In what delightful colours do the scriptures set forth, and describe this mysterious and great quality? Coeval with the Almighty, they represent him as possessing her in the beginning of his way, and using her agency in producing all that is great, precious, beneficial, magnificent, and delightful in the

universe.—Placed among men, she continues to produce the same precious and beneficial effects. She operates incessantly for their benefit. She holds out to them, in her right hand, length of days, and, in her left, she shews riches and honours. She confers the present, and assures the future happiness of their minds. She gives the human being all its value, and raises it to all its respect. She also operates extensively, wherever she appears bringing blessings with her, and dispensing beneficial influences widely around her. She manages nations and individuals; and raises them, by the same certain, though often imperceptible means, to comfort and to prosperity. The wealth of nations, as well as the stock of individuals, and the whole prodigious consequences and result of both, arise from her, and depend upon her. She dispenses the blessings of the present life, and introduces the human being, thus improved and raised, to the happiness of the future. She brings us near to the higher orders of existence, and, at last, unites us to the Almighty.—Come hither, then, O children, here is wisdom, if you know

to value it ;—wisdom which will bless you, and make you happy. What man desireth life, or, rather, what man does not desire it ? But what man desires it rationally ? What man wishes to live long, that he may see good ? To a request which we may conceive so important and universal, there is but one answer :—It is virtue which gives the boon. Be virtuous. Whatever comfort or respect, whatever use, value, or importance, attach to the human state, arise from it. Do you wish for length of days ? Be virtuous. Do you desire riches ? Be virtuous. Are you ambitious of respect ? Be virtuous. Do you value the peace of your mind, the improvement of your nature, the prosperity and glory of your family, or of your nation ? There is the same simple answer, and there can be no other to all these,—be virtuous. Or, are you actuated by still higher views ? Do you wish to raise yourselves to the higher orders of being, and even, if possible, to form a connection with the Almighty ? Be virtuous. There is no other mean. This is the wonderful one. It is the small seed, which being cast into the

earth, and cultivated, gives the comfortable and magnificent product. It overshades the whole earth. It rises to the heavens. It affords shade, defence, and protection, to all living creatures.—Cultivate your nature : Conduct yourselves well : Walk wisely : Be just : Be good : Be sober : Be useful. These are small seeds, but look not to what they are. Consider them in their process, and effects. Observe them operating throughout the system, and issuing uniformly in a most unexpected and amazing result. There is here, as in all the Creator's works, an agency which we know not. Powers, far beyond our conception, are contending. Qualities, which we comprehend not, are in action. Seeds, precious and important, are unfolding. Virtue calls to you from her high places. Unto you, O men, she calls, and her voice is to the sons of men : “ O ye simple, understand wisdom, “ and ye fools, be ye of an understanding “ heart. Hear, for I will speak of excellent “ things, and the opening of my lips shall be “ right things. Receive my instruction, and “ not silver, and knowledge rather than choice

“ gold. For my mouth shall speak truth, and
“ wickedness is an abomination to my lips.
“ All the words of my mouth are in righte-
“ ousness; there is nothing froward or per-
“ verse in them. They are all plain to him
“ that hath understanding, and right to them
“ that find knowledge. The fear of the Lord
“ is to hate evil; pride, and arrogancy, and
“ the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I
“ hate. Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom;
“ I am understanding, I have strength. By
“ me kings reign, and princes decree justice.
“ By me princes rule, and nobles, even all the
“ judges of the earth. I love them that love
“ me, and those that seek me early shall find
“ me. Riches and honour are with me; yea,
“ durable riches, and righteousness. My fruit
“ is better than gold, yea, than fine gold, and
“ my revenue than choice silver. I lead in
“ the way of righteousness, in the midst of
“ the paths of judgment. That I may cause
“ those that love me to inherit substance; and
“ I will fill their treasures.”—If the virtues
collected appear arduous, make your first es-
say upon a single virtue. Deign to prove the

truth of our former remark. You will find it not only an important, but beautiful experiment. Choose for yourselves any one of the virtues, the virtue by which you would wish to be distinguished, (and every man surely would wish to be distinguished by some virtue), or the virtue to which you feel yourself most inclined. Plant it within your heart, —cultivate it. It will begin immediately to produce its effects. It will attract around you from all sides what is good, and draw all the other virtues to itself. It will spread throughout your transactions, and gradually improve and brighten your whole character and situation. It will raise around you a paradise of external comfort and respect, and render your mind beautiful and glorious. What a magnificent scene would the world present to us, could mankind but be brought to this point, that every man universally would be emulous to distinguish himself by some one virtue? One would be called the just, another the prudent, the temperate, the beneficent, the merciful. All would assist, and improve all; the whole virtuous powers would be called forth,

and be seen acting at once throughout the earth. It should prompt us to cultivate ourselves; to reflect, that we are not acting merely for ourselves, but forming a fund of benefit for others;—that virtue goes out of us;—and that the effects of our good conduct are felt, and will long continue to be felt, throughout our whole connections, and dependencies. It is a glorious idea, and as just as glorious, that every man of virtue is a public man, and acts for multitudes. He has a certain sphere, within which his virtues operate, and dispense their influences. What is equally remarkable, they not only act in his own time, but they survive him, and continue to dispense their benefits even in the succeeding generations. Ah, what a pleasure it must give a man, to reflect that he is a blessing to multitudes; that the Almighty himself regards him with complacency, smiles upon his undertakings, and, for his sake, blesses all who are in connection with him? Such a man is sacred in his society. He has attained his proper situation among human beings, and is advanced to the first honours of his species.

“Mark the perfect man, for his seed shall be
“mighty upon the earth. The generation of
“the upright shall be blessed.”—Virtue is also
eternal. Her quality is universal, and results not
from human transactions, or any partial combination of circumstances, or situation of created beings. Her agency is everywhere the same, and is of equal importance throughout the universe. Inviolably connected with the Creator, wherever he works, it manifests itself, and dispenses the same precious influence throughout all the orders of his creation. “The Lord,” says she, “possessed me in the beginning of
“his way, before his works of old. I was
“set up from everlasting, from the beginning,
“or ever the earth was. When there were
“no depths,—when there were no fountains
“abounding with water; before the mountains were settled, before the hills, was I
“brought forth. While as yet he had not
“made the earth, nor the fields, nor the
“highest part of the dust of the world.
“When he prepared the heavens, when he
“set a compass upon the face of the deep,
“when he established the clouds, when he

“gave to the sea his decree, when he appointed the foundations of the earth,—then I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him.” Great agent of Deity! she was brought up with him from the beginning, and is the quality in which he delighteth. But observe the nature of her agency. She is the great *improver*. She rejoices with him in the *habitable* parts of his earth, in the cultivated societies of the species, delighting in their improvement and prosperity. Virtue is the mighty agent which works by secret, but wonderful, and certain means, cultivating, improving, and beautifying, the whole vast creation, and rendering it comfortable and delightful. It is the mysterious and great principle which supplies the internal stock of health and force, which inform and animate the universe.—It not only improves, but changes and creates. Wherever it works, it discovers itself by the most original, and wonderful effects, and raises before the delighted eyes, a new and beauteous creation. Nothing can be more descriptive of its opera-

tions than the language of the scripture; nothing more just or literal. The terms of creation must be used to denote the total change which it produces. It creates, in fact, a new man, and forms a new habitation for him. It changes the whole appearance, and even quality, of the earth. The man is born again, and finds himself surrounded with new conveniencies. It renders the man human, and the earth, in connection with him, comfortable and delightful.—Contemplating the final result of its operations, and the final improvement of the species, how beautifully does the prophet express himself! He describes the cessation of all hostile passions, and the reign of universal peace. He predicts their effects upon the system. Light breaks,—order arises,—happiness blooms. A new heavens and a new earth appear. She clothes the earth with beauty, and the heavens with glory and benignity. Operating throughout the vast universe, she is also represented as having a peculiar connection with the human species. Her delights are with the sons of men. She delights to improve an imperfect

species,—to comfort and to bring them forward. Now, therefore, “ hearken unto her,
“ for blessed are they that keep her ways.
“ Blessed are they that hear her, that watch
“ daily at her gates, that wait at the posts of
“ her doors. They that find her, find life,
“ and obtain divine favour. But they that
“ sin against her, wrong their own souls. All
“ they that hate her, love death.”—Great
Friend of the species! she is represented as
delighting in us. She is incessantly employed
in improving and comforting us. Where-
ever we tread, she makes flowers to rise before
us. She raises visions of peace and happiness
around us. She animates and informs youth.
She makes old age to be respected. She ren-
ders life one of the best gifts of the Almighty;
and, when life is exhausted, she leads us
beyond the pleasing scenes which she forms
for us here, to the land of blissful realities,
and the more perfect societies of the happy
hereafter. When shall the great effects be-
gin to manifest themselves! When shall the
time arrive, when her reign shall be univer-

sal; when the malignity of the system shall be suppressed; when vice shall be destroyed; when righteousness shall cover the earth; and when peace, order, and happiness, shall overflow the nations.

SERMON III.

On CRIMINAL PLEASURE.



ROMANS, viii. 6. 7.

*For to be carnally minded is death . . . because,
the carnal mind is enmity against God.*

THE dispensations of religion are adapted to the periods in which they are delivered. Though they are directed, in general, against all vice, yet they are directed, in a particular manner, against the vices which predominate in their own period. At the time, for instance, of delivering the Jewish law, the predominant vice of mankind was idolatry. The religion of Moses, therefore, directs itself chiefly against this vice. The unity of God, and the absurdity of idol-worship, are the great objects of his system. This is one use of giving

religion to mankind in separate portions, that it may oppose the vices successively as they arise, and become formidable to the happiness of the species.

When Christianity was manifested, the predominant vice of mankind was licentious pleasure. To this, many great causes obviously contributed. The general peace of the Empire, the increase of riches and of luxury, the nature of their religion, the infamous characters of their Gods, and the descriptive reasonings of a seducing philosophy, had removed every restraint from all ranks, and given authority to dissipation. Against this universal corruption, the Christian religion directed its greatest efforts. It laboured incessantly, wherever it addressed itself, to introduce a purer morality; and either to recal men to the primitive simplicity of virtue, or to refine and exalt their sentiments. This, when stripped of the mystical dress with which mere divines have obscured it, is the capital idea of the Apostle, in the comparison which he makes of the different states of mankind before and after the Christian revelation; and is forcibly de-

scribed under the several metaphors of the old man and the new, the carnal and the spiritual mind, the works of darkness and the works of light, the law of sin in his members warring against the law of his mind, the flesh and the spirit, the deadness of the body to sin, and the life of the spirit to righteousness. All these expressions are strongly descriptive of the particular direction which vice had taken in that period, and of the opposite effects of Christianity.

Contenting ourselves with just observing, as we pass, that this accounts for a fact which has been often remarked, viz. that Christianity is apparently a greater enemy to the sensual passions than any other religion; I shall endeavour, in this discourse, to treat the general proposition, and shew it to be an eternal truth, that the carnal mind, whether we mean by it the mind immoderately sensual, or, in general, the mind whose principles are licentious, is, in reality, "enmity against God."

In a former discourse, I endeavoured to unfold a principle which appears to be very important in the system, that vice possesses a ma-

lignity of quality which is at present but imperfectly known to us, but which is continually manifesting itself by its effects; and by this effect, in particular, that from the simplest beginnings, it produces uniformly the most extensive and amazing consequences. In some following discourses, I shall illustrate this farther, by giving examples of some particular vices. I shall shew, that these vices, though they appear always simple, and sometimes even hardly blameable in themselves, are utterly disproportioned in their effects; and that they lead uniformly, by certain, though perhaps imperceptible means, to the most unexpected and amazing issues. I shall begin with the vice of *Sensuality*.

I am abundantly sensible of the ridicule to which I am exposed, when I undertake, before the enlightened spirits of the present age, the discussion of so unfashionable an argument. In a cause like this, I engage at disadvantage. The cool dictates of reason are vainly opposed to arguments addressed directly to the constitution,—to the pressing persuasions of youth, and the eloquence of

beauty. It is an advantage to the orator, when the cause itself, which he defends, has the effect to warm him; when the very arguments he employs touch the springs of nature, and put his spirits in motion. In this situation, every advocate for pleasure meets the man of virtue. He worships the divinity of nature, invokes the powers of love and gaiety, opens his heart to elegant pleasure, and smiles at the superstition of those dreaming spirits, who think happiness a crime, or that the Deity will punish us for acting agreeably to principles which he himself has implanted in our constitution.

But surely the *management* of these principles is greatly in our own power, and for this part, at least, of the system we are accountable. As well may the murderer dispute the justice of his sentence. The plea of necessity, if it be a solid one, justifies every crime equally; and love is not a more certain part of our constitution than resentment and revenge. Shall the excess of every passion be judged worthy of punishment, and shall the ruins of innocence form an amiable exception?—But I

would meet my antagonist upon his own ground. Independent of its deserts, there is something in the nature of the habit itself which is pernicious. Its first effect is to destroy those feelings of delicacy which become a man, but in a woman are essential. It likewise destroys the affection of love itself, and is fatal to the source it sprang from. Is there an object on earth more delightful than a faithful and generous attachment? Is there a character more capitally deficient than that to which these tender sentiments are strangers? What, then, shall we think of the man, who, being originally possessed of these feelings, has destroyed them by acts of intemperance; and left nothing in the breast where such amiable inhabitants resided, but grossness and perfidy? Yet, this is the man of pleasure. Indifferent to every woman, he feels a momentary rage for all; and, while he has lost all respect for the sex, he is as incapable of love as of fidelity. Will a man like this make a tender husband, an affectionate father, or a respectable friend? What opinion must we have of his honesty, whose un-

derstanding is employed in forming snares for innocence? Or of his heart, who can turn, without emotion, from the tears of deserted beauty? But the fate of a lovely woman, in such circumstances, is, if possible, still more affecting. Blooming in innocence and health, the pride of her family, the delight of every eye, she comes forward to the world, an unsuspecting victim. View her in her next stage,—her delicacy extinguished, her honour lost, her beauty tarnished, and her whole soul as gross and prostituted as her conduct. Is not that habit of mind, then, “enmity against God,” which injures his fairest work, and destroys the graceful and noble fabric of humanity? The man of pleasure may affect to rally; but, in a case like this, ridicule becomes the object of compassion.

If there be a Providence which superintends this beautiful world, it must certainly delight in the order of its own works; and every agent which deforms the fair arrangement must be accounted an enemy. But, if order be an object of delight in the material system, the sight of happiness among men must afford an

higher species of pleasure; and every passion, which tends to destroy this, and convert human life into a scene of mourning and misery, must excite still deeper detestation. Need I stop to observe, that this is the uniform effect of licentious principles? I might appeal to the experience of families,—to the tears of humbled beauty, betrayed by the friend it trusted, to the wounds of honour, and the distracted breasts of mothers. How many happy domestic societies, who fondly flattered themselves that no distress could find a way into their little circle, have, by the admission of a man of pretended honour and sentiment, under the mask of tenderness and honourable affection, at the moment when they caressed, and loaded him with the friendship he solicited, been converted into scenes of desolation? It is needless to multiply words on this subject. Every man's own observation may furnish him with examples.

But it may be objected that the evil here is accidental; that still there is nothing positively vicious in the action itself; and that it is the compassion of mankind which renders

it detestable. Let us make the supposition, then, that the spirit of profligacy were diffused equally through all ranks ;—that every woman was a prostitute, and every man a villain. Would this make an amiable society? Would it be an object even of human complacency? The advocates for pleasure themselves are for confining it to a select circle. Licentious as they are, they are shocked at the thought of universal corruption ; and acknowledge, that the stability of society is established upon the virtue of the multitude. They only plead for an exception in their own favour, and that such enlightened spirits as themselves should not be bound by vulgar regulations. They consider not that no distinctions can convert vice into virtue ; that no part of a society can appear pleasing either to God or man, who have divested themselves of honour and fidelity. And this is the case of the votaries of pleasure. For with what trust does that woman deserve to be honoured, who has broken her most solemn engagements? Can we think her capable of friendship, who has injured her dearest friend, in

the tenderest point? Or can we place confidence in her fidelity, who has been already treacherous?—When we bring the injury home to ourselves, and make it our own case, the argument is still more conspicuous. Where is the father, who will justify the seduction of his child? Or the husband, who can hear of his wife's infidelity, and not be sensible of injury? Is chastity, then, only a virtue in your own wives and daughters? Or, are the eternal laws of morality the same, when divested of circumstances, and independent of particular attachments.

The love of pleasure is enmity against God, not only because it destroys the amiable human feelings, and introduces affliction and misery into society; but also because it is an enemy to that serious frame of mind which is the parent of virtue and religion. As the objects of religion and virtue are great, the mind which contemplates them must be sublime and solemn. Levity of behaviour, dissipation of thought, are inconsistent with that intense ardour of constitution which swells the soul with great designs, and makes it la-

hour after perfection. They are inconsistent with every great exertion, and every generous sacrifice. I know it is a topic commonly insisted on in this age, that religion is gay, and morality facetious; that they have no connection with severity; that they are engrossed with the common incidents of life; and lead their votaries successively from devotion to pleasure, from business to amusement. Such is the language of those genteel moralists, who either mean it as an apology for their own conduct, or, despairing to stem the torrent, endeavour to preserve at least the name of religion in the world, by accommodating it to the temper of the period. This pleasant religion, this simpering virtue, which sits so easy, and is so uniform, on men of every character, is not certainly that principle which leads up the immortal spirit to excellence. I am as great an enemy to gloominess as most people; but I can never be persuaded that the sublime spirit of religion can be reconciled to that levity of mind which teaches a man to consider the most serious subjects as sources of mirth; which diminishes his ad-

miration of what is great, as well as his detestation of what is base; and, consequently, destroys, imperceptibly, in his own mind, the distinction between vice and virtue. And are not these the uniform characters of an age of pleasure? Are they not the characters of our own? There never, in any period, was less virtue, and more sentiment, than in the present. Conscious of our deficiency in active virtue, we endeavour to impose upon mankind, and upon ourselves, by a copious exhibition of general maxims and fine thoughts, which serve no other purpose than to display our own agreeable convivial talents, and purchase for ourselves, from fools, and at the cheapest price, the characters of men of refined feelings, and delicate sentiments. Every appearance in life is become false or superficial. Conversation is substituted for action, and sentiment for virtue. Language has forsaken its channel; and, instead of pouring from the heart and affections, it proceeds, in a tortured stream, from the understanding, or imagination. Life is become one entire piece of affectation. Almost, in every case, we are o-

bliged to employ a set of ostensible motives; we conceal our real ones, because we have just virtue enough left to be ashamed of them; we understand one another, however, perfectly; and all our finess is exhausted in the issue of a few plausible speeches, which deceive nobody, without answering even any one solid political purpose. In the mean time, we support the appearance. As we find our honesty fail, we become louder in our assertions; indignation is succeeded by noise; the phantom of virtue is still pushed forward; and the sacred names of justice and conscience are employed, because a speech cannot be made without them, and to cover our particular attachments. In an age like this, when a man of real honesty makes his appearance, he is dreaded or detested. We say, with justice, that we do not know when we have or want him; because his conscience is uniform, and consequently approves our actions, and supports our measures, by accident.—Such is the picture of the age, and such the consequence of a spirit of licentiousness.

The sensual mind is an enemy to religion, and consequently to God, likewise in another view. The mind of man is undoubtedly formed for enjoyment. Pleasure is the spring of our actions, and whatever touches not this, will not affect us. In the enjoyment or pursuit of happiness, we waste our faculties, and exhaust our passions. The mind is, however, limited. One set of objects, one train of ideas, is sufficient to engross it; and, when it is once habituated to receive pleasure from a particular source, it returns instinctively to the same source; it exhausts its endeavours there, and never thinks of directing its activity to any other quarter. This is more uniformly the case when the pleasures it possesses are of an intoxicating nature, or when they are inconsistent with the admission of others which, though more sublime, are yet perhaps, from long disuse, less agreeable to the workings of our constitution. Now this seems to be the case, we may securely pronounce it to be the case, with sensual pleasure. How few can ever be recalled to virtue, who have once

tasted the intoxicating draught? How few return to the walks of reason, or the lessons of wisdom, who have once silenced their first scruples, and passed the fatal boundary? But that the pleasures of religion and of vice should exist in the same mind, and at the same time, is impossible. The visions of faith are widely distant from the grossness of sense; nor can the felicities of virtue mingle with such impurities. Though there were no inconsistency in the ideas themselves, the mind is too narrow to admit them at once. The fervour of our passions, the strength of our understanding, is exhausted; and we become incapable of resolution, or consistency. What a wreck of virtue, what a waste of noble faculties, is here? That vigour of mind, thus exhausted in the pursuit of pleasure, to what sublime heights of excellence might it urge the soul, were it directed into a proper channel? The same ardour of passion which makes a man a profligate, might raise him to the first eminence in virtue. As it is now employed, it serves only to debauch

his heart the more, and to plunge him still deeper in enormity.

That sensuality is death to the soul, and consequently enmity to God, will appear from a consideration which we have hitherto only touched upon, but which is as important as any of the preceding,—that character of dissimulation which it stamps upon the mind, those habits of insincerity and baseness which are, in certain respects, its necessary accompaniments. The term *seduce*, which experience has almost appropriated to this vice, sufficiently denotes its nature. The man of pleasure, translated into real language, is a man who employs himself to deceive and mislead the unexperienced part of his species;—who is continually holding out delusive views, who flatters that he may betray, and promises what he never means to perform. Add to this, that, to whatever degrees of wickedness we may have arrived, there is still a certain consciousness attached to vice, and a certain semblance, at least, of virtue, which most men would wish to preserve, and which render it necessary to dissemble also with the world. What

a train of vices follow from all these? What a hateful habit of concealment, what equivocal conduct, what mean finesse, what unworthy art, is necessary to cover the emotions of a heart, conscious of not intending well, fearful of discovery, suspicious of being detected, and where all the openness of virtue, and noble simplicity of innocence, are lost? The sensualist lives in the very school of duplicity, and we may conceive what a character will result from it.

Under whatever fine names we may disguise it, (and, if mankind are ingenious at any thing, it is in giving fine names to their vices) we may observe certainly, that a lustful creature is not respectable. People may allow for it as an infirmity; but, if a man makes a business of it, or sacrifices any important interest to it, he is not accounted a wise man. The advocates of pleasure have a plain ground to take. They have only to shew, that this passion is not like other passions; that it goes to no excess, and can do no injury. It will then follow, that no rules need be prescribed to it.

We may observe, that in active life, as well as in religion, habits of sensuality destroy the energy of the character. The forcing of nature, and the continued revulsion which there is good reason to believe it occasions, from the mental powers, exhaust the subject, and leave it in a state of inefficacy. If there have been exceptions to this rule, there are exceptions to all rules; but, in general, the effect of the vice is to destroy the man, and render him incapable of all serious exertion.

In what shameful, indelible degeneracy and disgrace, has the habit of this vice plunged the human character? It has the peculiar effect of reducing the human species to the level of the bestial; but it produces effects upon us which they do not experience. The histories of all nations concur to shew, that the stories of Sodom, and of the Court of Sardanapalus, are true descriptions. The man ruined, the human character degraded, and all the most sacred duties, and even tenderest connections of the moral life, confounded and violated, are part of the vileness which it conveys with it. Even where it arrives not at the last

debasement, the least effect of it is to destroy the manly character. The historian of a great sovereign relates, what is very astonishing, that his master, the most renowned character of his age, educated in the school of adversity, in every other respect honourable and noble, where his women were concerned, was mean and contemptible. He narrates, distinctly, that there he was not to be depended on, and that he had acquired habits of lying and equivocating. The vitiation was begun. The great monarch had already sunk into the gossip.

There is an observation which occurs to me here, and which I shall mention as in its place. It contributes to shew the issues of the vice, and direct our attention to them. The greater part of Christians are accustomed, in the earlier part of their lives, to consider the Bible as a revelation from God; and they see an indulgence in criminal pleasures numbered expressly among the vices it prohibits. When, therefore, it becomes necessary, for the ease of a man's own mind, to justify and defend these pleasures, he is naturally led to decry the re-

velation which prohibits them, and to reject that whole system, one part of which he flatters himself he has discovered to be fictitious. In doing this, he unavoidably removes one great barrier against vice of every kind. For, having concluded this to be no vice which religion had taught him to think a vice, he forms the same opinion of the rest; and soon applies his conclusion to every duty which he may find it convenient to violate. A state of future punishments and rewards, falls the first victim to these notions. He either reasons against the absolute existence of it, or he modifies it in such a manner as to render it in every case harmless.—It is the same case with the moral principle itself, even where religion is not concerned. When a man has acquired the habit of justifying the violation of any one class of duties, he is led gradually to dispute the obligation of all; until at last he ceases to perceive the difference between good and evil, and becomes totally unprincipled. Such is the history of the reasoning part of mankind.—With regard to those who are not qualified to reason upon these subjects, it is still, if possi-

ble, more pernicious. Having once broken what they had been accustomed to think a duty, and violated, if I may so express myself, the *entireness* of their virtue, they consider themselves as already vicious; their abhorrence of every vice diminishes with their abhorrence of this; and they soon become, in every respect, abandoned.—These reflections account sufficiently for an observation which is commonly made, and which the better casts sometimes please themselves with making, upon the lower classes of the society. It is very commonly observed of them, especially of the lower class of females, that, when they are once debauched by this vice, there is no vice afterwards of which they are not capable. The observation, so far as it goes, is true; but is not confined, by any means, to any one class or sex. The cause of the corruption is steady; and operates equally (though it may assume different forms) through all the orders and relations of the community. This is, indeed, the natural operation of every vice; but, as the law of the sexes is stronger and more general than most of the other laws of our na-

ture, the effects of *it* are necessarily more conspicuous. The vice bears the general mark of all vice. It is no sooner admitted and indulged, than it is observed to spread throughout the man, and to distemper, break down, and finally destroy, the whole principles and substance of the human character.

As every state of society has its proper vices, or, to speak with more precision, has vices which arise more directly out of that state, sensuality is generally accounted one of the characteristic vices of an opulent society. The causes of this we need not go far in search of. The scripture assigns two simple ones,—“fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness.” For the same reasons, that it is the vice of an opulent society, it is more particularly the vice of the opulent part of a society. Mentioning the two classes above, I am led unavoidably to observe, that one great, I may say, *the* great source of this vice, and of the miseries which it occasions, arises from the higher classes of society corrupting the lower. Hence it flows incessantly. Hence it spreads widely. There is a constant operation going on against the

morals of the people. Multitudes are daily added to the mass of the worthless; and not only the splendidly opulent, but every man who has gathered a little wealth, every poor human creature, who has attained to any measure of fulness, or of idleness, thinks it incumbent on him to discard immediately all his former habits, and sets himself to corrupt women.

That this vice, independent of the circumstances which may accompany it, possesses a quality which is highly vitiating in itself, is very obvious. It is with pain that I dwell for a moment upon the state to which it reduces the common herd, upon the shocking commerce of bodies, upon the mass, the disgusting, enormous mass of crimes, of depravity, and of disease, which it accumulates. These effects are certain, for they are every where the same; and it is there we see the last shocking issues of the process. We trace it to a degenerated species of human beings, susceptible of every indignity, and capable of every crime. It is very remarkable of this vice, and it is strongly expressive of its malignity, that the

Almighty has evidently set a special mark upon it.—But I proceed to observe, that, even among those who are not yet arrived at this degradation, those who pretend to refine upon the vice, and to render it systematical, the quality of it appears the same. The votaries of pleasure, as they call themselves, who make such pretences to liberality of principle, are by no means remarkable for the liberality of their dispositions. It is not among *them* that you are to look either for sincerity, tenderness, or beneficence. The repeated violations of their nature tend to efface their feelings, and their habits lead to concealment, and to treachery. A sensualist is obviously a selfish character. He has nothing in view but his own gratification; and, provided he attain this, he is but little affected by any other consideration.

This principle explains all the pleas which are commonly employed, and the defences which are set up for sensuality. They are all of the selfish and illiberal kind. I shall just mention a few of them.

Some sensualists, for instance, accuse the institutions of society. They alledge, that all

the inconveniences of this vice arise from the absurd rules which have been made about it, and seem to consider the legislators of nations as sitting down with no other view than to conspire against their pleasures, and deliberate maliciously how to stint them in their enjoyments. If these people could for a moment consider any thing but their own gratification, they might perhaps be convinced, that, instead of the inconveniences of vice arising from the institutions of society, the institutions of society arise from the inconveniences of vice; and that it is the experience of its bad effects which leads mankind to make laws against it. It is not, indeed, generally until vice becomes intolerable, that the indolence of mankind is roused, and they then find it necessary to deliberate how they may restrain it. With respect to the present vice, the history of all nations, as well as the transactions of domestic life in every nation, if they will but take the pains either to look into the one, or observe the other with attention, shew the consequences of it to be ruinous.

All their other pleas are of the same character. You will find others who argue, that, provided they respect the virtue of their equals, they may do what they will with their inferiors. An illiberal idea! It supposes that mankind have not equal rights. It concludes, that no part of the human species are to be considered but themselves, and their own cast. The idea, translated into meaning, is simply this, that where a man cannot injure with impunity, he must be cautious; but that where he can gratify himself without the hazard of being punished, he need not care whose rights he invades, or whose virtue he corrupts, and may commit whatever wickedness he is inclined to.

Perfectly similar to this reasoning is an argument which others advance concerning the two sexes. It is alleged, that, where this passion is concerned, the sexes are not upon an equal footing. They contend, that what is criminal in a woman is innocent in a man; and, while they are willing to lay every restraint upon the one sex, they give the other every possible liberty. It is unnecessary to

enter into the detail of this argument : It supposes, as in the last instance, that the rights of the two sexes are not equal. It is shewing a disposition to favour ourselves, and to tyrannize over the other part of our species. It is claiming a privilege to ourselves which we refuse to them ; and affirming, in other words, that, if we do an injury to them, it is nothing, but, if they do one to us, it is criminal.

It is curious to observe how tenacious our sex are of this point, and with what keenness we claim an exclusive privilege of sinning. We will have it, that, on our part, this vice is a slight matter, but that it is not good for the women. To establish this valuable right, we set up various pleas. We allege, that, though a man transgress, he has prudence to keep within bounds ; whereas, a woman, if she once deviate, becomes unbounded : We say, that a man may transgress without giving away his affections ; whereas, a woman cannot deviate without surrendering her affections at the same time : And, lastly, we have discovered, that, where there is a mar-

ried connection, the infidelity of the man has no other consequence than the act itself, whereas the infidelity of the woman has a consequence upon property. It may have the effect to introduce another man's children into the family, and give a false heir to the inheritance.

From all these pleas, there is one conclusion which clearly arises, that we have discovered the evil of this vice in the other sex. We have also a glimpse of the confusion introduced by it. But, then, *we* have no hand in it. We are still disposed to favour ourselves, and to justify our own vices. We are determined to think that no body's interest or feelings but our own are worth considering.

Barely to state these pleas, is to expose them. Not to mention that the first and second are inconsistent with one another, I am afraid that the first is a deception. The tendency of this vice in both sexes is to dissipate; but the superior delicacy of the female sex renders their vices more conspicuous. This is so true, that the same actions or habits, which are hardly observed in a man, in a woman

appear shocking. With respect to the second plea, whether or not the parties, when they transgress, do it from the weakness of affection, depends upon the degree of vice they are arrived at. The direct tendency of this vice is to ruin the affections, and it produces this effect in both sexes. It will hardly, I believe, be affirmed that there are not sufficient instances in both of viciousness, without the plea of affection. It is very curious, in the married state, and shews how much this vice has disturbed language, to hear the husband affirm that he can be unfaithful, and yet preserve his affection for his wife. But, it seems the female cannot do this. She always loses her affections. One conclusion certainly follows from the premisses, that the husband expects what he is not disposed to give; and that, in a miserable situation of this sort, they have not that affection which they ought to have for one another.—With respect to the third plea, that the infidelity of the female may affect the property, it is fortunate that the sensualist, amidst the liberality of his sentiments, does not forget every thing. Though

he has no sense of virtue, he has a feeling of property. He thinks that his wife should consider his property. In the first place, it is granted that the infidelity of the female may affect the property. But let me ask, may not the infidelity of the male also affect the property? This argument is of a species very common with sensualists. It is illiberal: It is selfish: It supposes that the female is of no consideration, and that she is a mere appendage to the property. It presumes also, that the property comes with the man. What then becomes of the objection when it resides in the woman? It would seem that there is then no obstacle. But wherever it resided originally, shall I be thought to do injustice to the precious depôt, (the consideration which is attended to when all other considerations are disregarded) if I presume that marriage renders it common? I may venture, I think, to lay it down as a principle, that marriage forms it into a common stock for the parties, and for their children. I presume that the parties come together, and that the marriage union is understood to be formed upon these

terms. This I suppose to be the intent of nature, and the principle of marriage, among every enlightened and free people. Will the connections of the husband, then, not affect the property as well as the connections of the wife; and will the common interests of the family receive no injury from them? How often must melancholy experience be appealed to? It is not by any means a rare case, but, on the contrary, perfectly common, that while the unhappy female, with her family, is abandoned to solitude and poverty, the unprincipled husband is found abroad, wasting the property upon himself, and dissipating the stock which ought to support his household, and be a future provision for them, upon his own gratifications. Yet he speaks of his property. When his wife is concerned, he pleads his property. The waste of substance, and confusion of families, then arise before him. The female may do infinite injury. He, it seems, can do none. The complexion of his arguments is sufficient to shew the effects of this vice upon the character. So many tender connections as he has formed have not

had the effect to expand his affections, or to give him a single interest beyond himself. The moment that another person is concerned, the illiberality of his mind appears. His regards are completely concentrated within himself. Even in the case of vice, he pleads for an exclusive liberty of transgressing. His object is to gratify himself, and, in the fullness of this passion, all other interests and considerations, of wife and family, of character and affection, let me add, of virtue and of religion, are extinguished.

It is unnecessary to pursue this argument farther. Enough has been said to shew the illiberal spirit of this vice, the disorders it produces, and its pernicious effects upon the heart. The expressions of the Apostle are strong, but well adapted to the subject. He describes it as death, and as enmity against God. It is death to the character, and to the mind. It destroys that sincerity, that active energy, and all those liberal affections which support or ornament the human nature, and which bind mankind, by the tenderest and firmest connections, to one another. The

conclusion, therefore, is direct. It is in enmity with God, and goes directly against the great views of his administration.

I shall now, therefore, conclude this discourse, with stating the very important improvement which arises from it, and which I beg leave to recommend particularly to the sensualist, as deserving of his especial consideration.

Let me then observe, in the first place, that if there be a moral governor of the universe, such as we suppose, a being supremely wise, powerful, and beneficent, who created the world with some great view, and continues to administer it with the same view, it is, first of all, obviously our interest to be upon good terms with him; and, in the next place, we should account it our duty, as it is certainly our honour, to concur with his measures. Considering the universe in this light, we will be at pains, if we act a reasonable part, to explore the laws of his empire, and give due observance to them. It is thus alone that we can concur with his views; and if all these laws be at the same time so calcu-

lated as to improve our nature and our state; we will, by the same conduct, cultivate our own best interests, and advance the general happiness of our condition.

The passions are all implanted in our nature for the wisest purposes. There is not one of them which has not its use, and which does not constitute a necessary part of our system. At the same time, it is obvious that they may be abused, and, whenever this is the case, they produce uniformly the most fatal consequences. It ought, therefore, certainly, if we wish to act our parts properly in the general system, to be our first care to guard ourselves solicitously against the abuse of our passions; and to direct them, and all the other principles of our nature, by all possible means, to their proper objects.

No passion has produced more good or more bad effects than the passion of the sexes. Delightful in itself, it is also obviously necessary in the system. But, as it is capable of producing the purest pleasures, and is of the highest use, when it is properly directed; so, when it is abused and vitiated, it produces uni-

formly the most criminal, as well as the most humiliating and miserable consequences.

Happily for our nature, we can be at no loss to discover the proper object of this passion. It is the preservation of the species; and, in accomplishing this, it has the farther effect to unite mankind to one another by the most permanent, and the most delightful connections.

How pleasing is the affection of love, when it first approaches the soul, arrayed with its native innocence and simplicity? It is ushered into the breast with the most delightful emotions, and awakens all the tenderest sympathies. It transports us beyond ourselves, creates a paradise around us, and gives us new interests and enjoyments. The selfish passions then cease to be regarded, and the generous affections take their turn to reign. All nature appears in her most pleasing form, and we feel ourselves in harmony with the universe. The mind is then in its highest, and its best state. Why should I describe it? You, who have felt the impression, and can recal the ideas of the pleasing morning of your lives,

can tell us that this affection is one of the perfect gifts of heaven, dispensed to mankind to heal their cares, and multiply their enjoyments, by creating the tenderest relations among the species, and uniting them more intimately with one another.

There are two systems with respect to this affection, which offer themselves to our consideration, the libertine system, and the system of the married life. The effects of the former we have described. It presents us with all the melancholy effects of vitiated passion. If our argument upon it has been just, it is evident that it goes directly in opposition to the happiness of the species, and to the great object of the Creator. The individual it corrupts, the society it disorders. It ruins the affections, and destroys the tenderest connections of the species. It is a system selfish and mischievous. Like all other selfish systems, too, it defeats itself. Instead of multiplying our enjoyments, it contracts them; instead of expanding the mind, it renders it illiberal; and destroys all the nobler affections of the soul, by debasing

its regards, and teaching it to confine all its views to one unprofitable gratification.

The system of the married life, is, in all respects, different. The obvious effect of it is to multiply our enjoyments, by carrying us beyond ourselves, and giving us the tenderest interest in others. The gratification of the passion is but the opening of the scene. The tenderest relations are created, the most delightful connections of life arise around us. We acquire the fidelity of friendship, and the delights of children. These are by far the purest pleasures of our state. They teach us the value of our nature, and connect us strongly with our kind. They give us an interest in the world, and make us enter intimately into the society of our species. Exhausted with our exertions, and fatiated as we would be with our own experience, we resume our lives, and renew our pursuits in our children. These give us an interest in life to the last. In these we feel a concern superior to any that we feel for ourselves. They present an important object to our mind, which furnishes the most delightful employment of our lives;

redoubles the enjoyments, and enables us to bear the difficulties of our state with cheerfulness and perseverance.

When we look abroad upon the earth, we find that the actual administration of providence concurs, in the most admirable manner, with the views of right reason upon this subject. The first period of our being is feeble. Our state of infancy is long. A permanent connection of the parents is, therefore, necessary, even for the rearing of the young.

—It is the same case with our minds. Though capable of the highest improvement, they are originally weak and uninformed. Under the same permanent connection, therefore, they receive that cultivation of which they are capable. This connection is so essential a part of our economy, that, without it, if the human species would not absolutely perish, it will be allowed universally that they could not receive that perfection to which our nature may be conducted, but must remain for ever in a very feeble and savage state. The world, accordingly, is administered upon this principle. The tendency of the passion of the

sexes, in its natural, unvitiated state, is to form permanent connections. Mankind are distributed into innumerable separate families. These families are the great sources of population, and the great seminaries of improvement; and these advantages are found to arise in a very exact proportion to the equity, and to the permanence of the connection. These families also form the great cement of society, by the innumerable connections which they create, and the tender relations which they are continually giving us to one another. Upon these is founded the population, the union, the improvement, and the stability of the species. The system of the married life, therefore, is not only preferable in itself, but is agreeable to the liberal policy of the earth, and the benevolent administration of the Creator.

I. In the first place, then, as the first improvement of this argument, may I be allowed, in opposition to the system of the libertine, to bring forward, and recommend, the system of the married life. Even amidst the

distresses of the first Christians, the Apostle lays down the doctrine that marriage is honourable in all, and also proposes it as the best antidote against licentiousness. If the passion of the sexes be so agreeable, it is the business of every wise man to consider how it may be so regulated as that it may be preserved unvitiated. It is in this state alone that this, or any other passion, can be preserved from disorder, and made to produce the greatest quantity of happiness. The married life attains all the objects, and avoids all the disorders of the passion. Under the permanent connection of marriage, prudently formed, and virtuously conducted, we may pronounce the passion of the sexes to be productive of the highest happiness of which it is susceptible. We experience the most faithful friendship, the only friendship to which we can absolutely trust; we enjoy the fondest affections of our nature; we are of the greatest use in our society; we live amidst the respect, love, and confidence of our family. The married state is honourable. It gives us a consequence among our species, and engages us with the

Creator himself in carrying on the general policy of the system. We are in harmony with his measures, and may consider ourselves as acting with him. It also preserves us from the disorders of the passion, by presenting objects, and creating affections in our minds of such superior tenderness and importance as to absorb all others.—The libertine is a common enemy. He is a selfish character, who takes the benefits of society, and yet withholds his proportion from the general stock. He is a robber, who is continually breaking in upon the established order of the earth. He is a beast of prey, who, from his solitary den steals into the peaceful village, to infest the happiness of families, and carry destruction among them. In a word, he is a corruptor of his species. Unfeeling of all considerations but what respect himself, he never expands his mind to the great interests of his species, or to the general administration of the earth. Yet such is the absurdity of human vanity, that even this being talks of the liberality of his views, and of his freedom from prejudice. The monk and the li-

bertine go together. They are either useless burdens, or direct nuisances to the society; and the same liberal policy which suppresses the one, ought, upon the same principles of public good, to discourage and suppress the other.

Permit me to make an observation here which this state of the argument naturally suggests. It relates to the opulent part of the society. Men of property, as they have a greater stake than others, are particularly interested in preserving the virtue of the society; and their situation leads them naturally to take part in the management and regulation of it. In fact, it is in the discharge of this duty that they appear respectable, and they cannot depart from it without a degradation of their character. The wisdom of the Creator in adjusting the means to the end which is to be produced, is every where observable. It is necessary, in this imperfect state, that one part of us should be employed to regulate the other. This is the great law of our present condition; and that this law may execute itself, and be carried steadily into effect, there

is always a part of the society who acquire a superior interest in the enforcement of it. These are the men of property. The moment that a man acquires a property, he acquires a particular interest in preserving the order, and enforcing the good conduct of the society. What is equally remarkable, the same situation which gives him an interest in the good conduct of the society, gives him also a power to enforce it ; and this is evidently the great cause why property and power are connected together. The man of property, by his very acquisition of property, becomes in fact a natural magistrate, and finds himself engaged on the side of justice and of good policy. How humiliating, then, is it, (and yet it daily happens) when the guardians of the people become their seducers, when the very men, who are the most interested to preserve the morals of the society, employ themselves in corrupting them? Besides the viciousness of this conduct, it contains a peculiar strain of folly and contradiction. Here again we trace the miserable inconsistency of our nature. We would gratify our vices, and

at the same time we find it necessary to guard against the bad effects of them. We, therefore, corrupt, and we make laws against corruption. We cause disorders, and we correct the disorderly. We seduce, and we punish those whom we have seduced. Hence those miserable consequences which affect every good mind with compassion. It is to these dealers in vice that we owe the misery of so great a part of our species, who fill our streets with nuisance and disease, and our ways with violence, who live in vice and in debasement, and who perish with every circumstance of wretchedness.

To every right mind, there is one consideration which ought to recommend the married connection. As the libertine life is the natural school of selfishness and insincerity, the married state is as obviously the natural school of sincerity, and of the right affections. We no sooner enter into the married life, than our affections are expanded beyond ourselves. We may go still a step farther, and appeal to the experience of mankind, whether the generous affections which this state creates be not greatly stronger, and more delightful, than

any affection which concerns ourselves. Our affections, thus directed to objects without us, continue to expand themselves. Our hearts acquire sensibility, we are accustomed to feel for others, and learn to consider ourselves as only parts of a dependency. The virtues, as well as the vices, depend upon one another. Accustomed to feel for others, we acquire a sense of justice. Instead of considering nothing but ourselves, we learn to respect the feelings, and the rights of other people. Selfishness is the natural quality of the solitary life. Society calls forth the moralities; but to do this effectually, the society must be dear to us. We see clearly the rights of those we love, and soon learn to be just where justice and affection go together. Our injustice to others arises from want of regard to them, and the best means of being just to all, is to cultivate a benevolence for the species. But as this is the highest culture of our nature, we must begin, in a smaller circle, and we cannot practise with more advantage than within our own families. The married life is, for the same reason, the school of sincerity. The

objects around us are too dear to us, that we should think of deceiving them, or that we should vitiate their minds with bad maxims. We are interested to make them what they ought to be; and, in forming them, we at the same time form, and improve our own characters. It is not within the married state that we learn the habits of dissembling. On the contrary, it is the discipline of honesty, and the natural school of rectitude. If it be possible to teach a man the value of the virtues, he will learn it within his family. It is generally observed, that the most profligate parent wishes his children to do well, and feels that concern for their conduct which he did not use to feel for his own. The most obvious tendency of the domestic society is to form the mind, and to educate us for acting a proper part in the greater society of the world. Let any man, if he doubt this, observe human life. Let him consider the same man in a solitary, and in a married state. He will then be convinced that marriage is a reformer. He will meet with numerous instances of men whom no other means could reclaim;—worth-

less, in all respects, in their single state, in their married state, virtuous and respectable. Such is the force of the affections which it creates, the consideration to which it leads, and the new views which it opens before the mind.—Need I repeat that it is the enemy of the licentious, and disresponsible habits. Under the married connection, the passion of the sexes is succeeded by a sweeter affection, and gives place to more interesting connections. We regard it only in the second place, and derive our chief happiness from other sources. To every man then who wishes to cultivate his nature, and assume a respectable part in his community, let me recommend the married life. In doing this, I recommend nothing but what nature herself, while she is right nature, leads to. Wherever Providence has a great end to accomplish, she creates a correspondent sentiment. The passion of the sexes itself leads forcibly towards a permanent connection. What we love, we wish to appropriate, and to make it ours for ever. This is the affection which sways all the honest part of our species. Reason adds strength to

this sentiment, by discovering its necessity, and its utility. The principle is so obvious, that the marriage law, or custom of every country, is founded upon it; and the disorders which uniformly follow the neglect of it, demonstrate clearly where the virtue ends, and where the vice begins, and confirms all our reasonings upon this subject.

But, while we thus recommend the married connection, we must observe, that sometimes, though not nearly so often as is pretended, marriage is not convenient. In an improved society, where wealth abounds, it is alleged, that the means of living are more difficult, and consequently marriage less practicable. This objection, when nearly examined, fades almost into nothing. First of all, we may observe, that the article of expence is not generally supposed to be upon the side of licentiousness. The objection, then, though we should admit it, gives no encouragement to vice. But in the next place, the objection itself does not amount to so much as to form a very important obstacle to marriage. The position is not founded. The wealth of a socie-

ty, instead of diminishing the means of living, multiplies them. It does not, therefore, render the means of living, but the means of living *vainly*, more difficult. The fact is, that men will *vy* with one another. In an improved society, there are great fortunes accumulated; and, wherever this happens, all the little, inferior fortunes will emulate them. Here, then, lies the obstacle. It is not that in an improved society, marriage is less practicable, but that the man of inferior fortune will live in the same stile with the man of superior fortune. He will not marry unless he can roll in riches, and make an appearance which does not suit his condition. It is not, therefore, the state of the society, but his own vanity, which forms the obstacle. For the sake of this wild idea, he abstains from marriage; or, if he does marry, it is generally from motives which defeat the intent, and induce him to forego all the advantages of it. Hence also, instead of regulating him, it has the contrary effect, and becomes an additional source of licentiousness. At the same time, it will be allowed that the objection contains something

in another view. There are individuals, in every state of society, who cannot marry conveniently ;—there are certain situations in which marriage would be imprudent. Admitting this, then, in general, allow me,

2. In the second place, as another antidote to licentiousness, and as another very proper mean of forming our nature, to recommend to all those of the society who cannot marry with prudence, to engage themselves in some honourable, active, and useful pursuit in life.

First, then, you who cannot, with prudence, enter into the married connection, it is incumbent upon you to guard yourselves solicitously against the well known effects of this affection. Indulged with virtue, it is a source of the sweetest pleasures ; abandoned to vice, it produces the greatest disorders ; admitted, and not gratified, it commits the wildest ravages in the mind. Turn your minds then from it. Fly its approaches. Ah ! it is too agitating a passion. It acts with such force upon the youthful heart, as to exhaust the vigour, and distract the noblest faculties. Like

the food of the earthquake, if it be buried within, it will work with alarming symptoms, and lay the man in ruins. Then you see the promising youth decline. Rendered useless to himself, and to society, he wanders amidst the scenes of life, solitary and abstracted. The business of men affords him no joy, the splendours of nature smile not to him, and he is sick of the light, and of his existence. To guard yourselves from this situation, there is no better mean than to engage your youth in some of the active pursuits of life. This nature prompts, this the passion itself evidently points to.—First, nature, by various signals, prompts you to activity. She calls upon you not to suffer the season of your youth to pass away unemployed, and in obscurity. It is for this that she has endowed the young mind with active qualities, and given it such sensibilities of emulation. Youth is the native season of exertion, and age of repose. How inglorious, how unmanly, is the inactive mind, which has never put itself forth, but walked about an useless and lazy load upon the earth? Activity also forms a proper dis-

cipline for our nature. Our virtues, as well as faculties, are improved by exertion. Activity, first of all, preserves the mind sound, and satisfied. This is so far favourable. It does more. Active industry creates property, and property discovers the value of justice, and of laws. It creates competence, and competence gives decency and respect, and sets a man above the temptations of dishonesty. Activity, therefore, improves our virtues. It would be superfluous to shew that it improves our faculties.—The married life itself leads to this, by affording additional motives towards it. The married state is not, by any means, as some pretend, an enemy to active life. On the contrary, it brings us more into the world, and engages us more deeply in its concerns. But, at present, I speak to those who cannot yet enter into this state. With respect to them, it is peculiarly necessary to give their minds an object. This will preserve them from improper pursuits, and from distracting passions.—Activity is also the great improver of our state. Here, again, another of the great views of Providence opens before

us. To make the earth support the greatest possible number of inhabitants, and to place them in their best state, it is necessary, first of all, to raise from it the greatest possible quantity of produce. Stores must be every where accumulated for their subsistence, arts must be invented, and perfected, for their convenience, sciences also must be established, and cultivated, for the improvement of their minds. All these must arise, and be derived from their stock of industry. The Creator has, therefore, endowed us with active principles, and has made our chief happiness to consist in action. In improving the earth, in multiplying its produce, in cultivating the arts of life, in perfecting the knowledge of our state, or the order of our species, we act with the Supreme Parent, and, at the same time, find, that we are employed in the most agreeable, and in the most useful manner for ourselves. Hence, also, the different propensities which actuate different men, and which impel the species to all the numerous pursuits of life. These lead us to cultivate our state in every mode, and to multiply for ourselves the

greatest number of conveniences, and the greatest possible quantity of produce. The Creator has also provided, that this mode of living should place the human being in his proper station of respect. Indulge, then, with alacrity, this great principle of your nature. Employ yourselves in some active and useful pursuit. Be satisfied that, in doing this, you please God, and, at the same time, improve your nature and your state. You also find employment for your minds, (that employment which is suited to them) and preserve them from improper habits.—The passion of the sexes leads to activity. It calls upon us to remove the obstacles to our union with the beloved object. It leads us to this, also, in a higher view. That we may attain the object of our affections, we must first render ourselves deserving of her. We must labour, by honourable exertions, to acquire that respect which is necessary to justify the attachment. These were the ideas of our virtuous ancestors, while the passion remained simple and uncorrupted. It is the great law of the affection, which renders it subservient to virtue, and

which uniformly accompanies it in its unvitiated state. If, then, you wish to taste the blessings of the connection, and to raise yourselves to the chief felicities of your present nature, study first to render yourselves worthy of them. Pursue that life which will do you honour. Live so as that you may be respected. Remove, by your active exertions, the difficulties which now impede your wishes. Conduct yourselves in such a manner, as to render a connection with you respectable. By these means you raise your name, and give value to your pursuit. You preserve your minds unvitiated, and prepare yourselves to receive, in due time, the sweetest felicities of your state. It is labour which renders repose agreeable, and it is exertion which gives its value to the reward. By these means, also, you preserve yourselves from the great source of improper habits,—idleness. We may know immediately when any great law of our nature is departed from, by the pernicious effects which follow. In the present case, these are conspicuously visible. Activity is one great law of our state. We cannot, therefore,

depart from it, and indulge idleness, without corrupting ourselves. Idleness is the great parent of the vices. Activity leads not by surer steps to prosperity and respect, than idleness does to misery and degradation. Activity produces, in a train, industry, competence, honesty, and respect. Activity teaches us the value of justice and of laws. Idleness produces, in as close a train, dissipation, poverty, dishonesty, disgrace, and misery. Idleness, in particular, fosters the gross passions of our nature. Nourished by fulness, it leads to the most disrespectable habits. It renders us lustful, intemperate, and pestiferous. Observe the difference between the first active gatherers of property, who raise themselves to respect by their exertions, and their posterity, the worthless dispersers of it, who decline in that respect proportionably as they diminish it.

How contemptible is the man of property, who goes about corrupting the society, and practising those vices which render him at the same time mischievous and ridiculous? Has he no better way in which he can em-

ploy his wealth? Is this his return of gratitude? Or, is it thus he discharges his trust as a natural guardian of the community? He has indeed a wide field of honourable exertion before him. Whether he takes his natural station as a magistrate, or assumes a place in the legislature of his country, or engages himself in beneficent designs, in his private situation, he may be eminently useful and respectable. His mind needs not languish or be vitiated, for want of employment. His country and mankind have extensive claims upon him. In him, who has objects before him of such magnitude and interest, idleness and viciousness must be doubly criminal. Let him then arise, and, while he can, put himself forth. Let him improve his mind by exerting it. Let him use his wealth nobly,—for the happiness and improvement of his species. Ah! what good might he not do, and what pleasure might he not confer upon others, and upon himself? He may set examples of improvement to his country. He may civilize the species, and he may change the earth. He may convert his neighbourhood widely

around him from a savage to a cultivated state, from a desert to a paradise. He may at the same time entertain his own mind, and give employment and subsistence to multitudes. By good example, and by the uniform enforcement of the laws, he may give stability and security to society. Or, is there no field for the display of the nobler affections,—for generosity, and for beneficence? Can he find no occasions of exerting himself for illustrious purposes,—in patronizing merit, or relieving distress, in improving, alleviating, and diffusing happiness among his species? How many families might he make happy? From how many soft eyes might he draw the tear of gratitude? What smiles of complacency would meet him wherever he went? What looks of joy, what silent prayers, what blessings, would attend his progress? It is thus alone that he must live to be respected. There never has been, there never can be, but one way in which a man can acquire respect. He must have property, (this encourages the great law of activity) and he must do good with it, and shew that he is well affected to.

wards his species. If he live only for himself, or if he go about injuring or corrupting them, he will merit, and must necessarily incur, their detestation.

I come now to conclude. Looking back upon the extensive field which has opened before us, we must be struck with the observation of a cause seemingly so simple in itself, leading to issues of such importance. The whole extensive effects we have described, proceed from the simple difference between a temporary, and permanent connection of the sexes. This difference, apparently so harmless, that one would think it might be safely left to men themselves, leads on all sides of it to the most amazing results. The arrangement of the earth into families, is one of the simple and great laws of the Creator. It is in effect the source of the civilization and pre-eminence of our species; and it cannot be disturbed without immediately vitiating and convulsing the whole human system.

There is a topic commonly insisted upon in this argument, which is liable to be misunder-

stood. Vice is very justly defined to be the doing of injury ; and, in warning men against licentiousness, we say very properly that we only call upon them to abstain from injury. The rule is just, but may be misapplied. The misfortune is, that we are not always judges of injury. We may think that we are doing no injury when we do the greatest. Vice is an unknown quality. We have neither a complete idea of its nature, nor do we see far into its consequences. Do nothing, by any means, that you see does injury. So far you go by a sure rule. But do not stop there. Abstain from vice as vice. Let it satisfy you that God forbids it. Remember also that the experience of ages has determined the quality of actions ; and, though you may not immediately see it, yet be assured that all vice finally does injury. Accustom yourselves to look forward to the issues of human actions, and to take a large view of them. Upon licentious principles, no society can be supported, nor can any individual attain to the proper honours of his nature. How different is the situation of the sensualist, grown old in lechery

and iniquity, from that of the venerable patriarch, who dwells amidst the honours of his family? "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace." The laws which support the system are established upon the happiness of the individual. Love is the natural reward of merit; and, even whatever may be the state of the society, it will be found that she confers uniformly her sweetest blessings upon the virtuous.

SERMON IV.

ON PRIDE.

—●—
 DANIEL v. 30.

*In that Night was BELSHAZZAR, the King of
 the Chaldeans, slain.*

HUMAN historians, in the narration of events, are generally disposed to rest their narratives upon second causes. The scheme of a politician, the success of a battle, or the external resources of a people, appear to them sufficient to account for all the great revolutions by which this globe has been affected. Some of them, indeed, have occasionally had a glance of causes which belong to a higher order; and, in the descriptions which they have given of the effects of luxury, seem to have apprehended somewhat of that unknown and dangerous malignity by which vice ma-

nifests itself.—The sacred historians express themselves in a more decided manner. Scripture makes the important discovery, that moral causes are the ultimate ones, into which all others may be finally resolved. It appears to be the capital design of this singular book, to convince mankind that there is a certain, though frequently an invisible connection between vice and misfortune. While human writers (to the surprise of a serious, reflecting man) have their attention so engrossed with second causes, that they leave ultimate, or first causes entirely out of their system; the sacred historians (which is surely more philosophical) bestow their principal attention here. In recording the revolutions which happen in this world, they set down God for a principal part; and represent these revolutions as the necessary effects of his government. Placed at the head of the system, they uniformly represent him, as we would suppose a moral governor to be employed, distributing rewards, and inflicting punishments, according to their deserts, on men and nations. The passage we have read is an instance, and a celebrated

one, of these observations: "In that night
"was Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans,
"slain."

These words will afford me an opportunity of illustrating, in some measure, the nature of the supreme government under which we live. That there is such a government, cannot be doubted by men who believe a God; and a little reflection will convince them that, if there be such a government, the influence of it upon human affairs must be of the most extensive nature. In discoursing, therefore, upon this subject, I shall begin with observing the causes, as they are related by the historian, which led this great king to his fall: I shall then make some observations upon the justice of his fate: and, lastly, shall consider at some length the nature of the vices themselves with which he is charged.

The history of the royal house of Babylon is concise and affecting. It is a memorable instance of the danger of prosperity, and the instability of human greatness. The vices of Belshazzar were the vices of his family. The

empire of the Chaldeans was brilliant, but of short duration. Like the plant of a kindly sun, it rose swiftly to its height, and as suddenly decayed. Had they but known how to use their greatness, it might have been prolonged. Power is like riches, and must be maintained by the same prudent management by which it was acquired. If a man relaxes his vigour, and exercises not his abilities, it produces the same effect as if he had no abilities to exercise.—The Chaldean sovereign, at his entrance into public life, drew the attention of all mankind. Fired with the ambition of conquest, he passed from province to province, and extended his empire and his fame with a rapidity which had not been excelled. The Assyrian empire, ancient and extensive, first yielded to his force; and the Pharaohs of Egypt, as ancient and as powerful, who had marched, through numerous nations, to seek him on the banks of his own Euphrates, were repulsed, and subdued. But he was then vigilant and active, and his people were laborious. There is something in the climates of the East which relaxes the

mind, or renders it extravagant. Their air and situation produce the same effects on them, as the power of an active imagination is supposed to do on other people. Common minds subside into indolence and pleasure, and uncommon ones rise into fury. Hence it is that moderation is unknown in every situation, that adversity dejects their minds, and prosperity raises them far above their level. In proportion to these effects, more vigilance is requisite.—NEBUCHADNEZZAR had reached the summit of ambition, but what he gained in fame and power he seemed to lose in understanding. He forgot his first maxims of diligence and prudence, and became vain in his imagination. Proud of his conquests, he ascribed them to his own right hand; and the God of heaven, to whom he owed every advantage, was disregarded and forgotten. Such impiety and folly, though heaven had not interposed, must have led him to destruction. The effect proceeded naturally from the cause, and has taken place without a miracle. But heaven did interpose, in a manner so signal and terrible, as might have left an impression

upon remote posterity. This proud king was humbled, and reduced to moderation. He was punished with the loss of that understanding on which he raised his vanity, and of that respect and authority which he claimed as his own prerogative.—In these early periods, it is probable that many of those establishments which are the effect of reflection, and take place in advanced society, were wanting. Those gloomy domes, sacred to solitude and fury, where the frantic inhabitant may rave and weep without danger to society, were unknown. This great king, in the depth of his vast dominions, could find no asylum for himself, and his misfortunes. In their own defence, they were forced to expel him from the society. He was driven raving to the forest, exposed to the rigours of heaven, and mingled with the beasts whom he resembled. Where was now great Babylon, which he had builded, for the house of his kingdom, by the might of his power, and for the honour of his majesty? Here he had hoped to repose, after a life of turbulent ambition, and give laws to the nations. The king of nations wanders in

the desert, forlorn as the storms, avoided by his counsellors and friends, and neglected by all mankind.—I shall not mention in what manner he recovered his understanding, and with it his moderation. One would be ready to conclude that so signal an event must have left an impression, not on himself alone, but his successors. It did leave an impression, but not on Belshazzar.—The reason frequently why one man is not warned by the misfortunes of another, is, that he considers these misfortunes as proceeding from natural causes, and not as the effects of the Divine displeasure. We consider not that there is a necessary connection, even in this world, between certain vices and sufferings. This connection is in harmony with God, and forms part of his government of the world. Whether, therefore, the king lost his understanding by an immediate, supernatural stroke, (which seems to be the fact here) or whether he lost it by giving the reins to his own ungovernable passions, it was equally a punishment, and a punishment inflicted by God:—Yet did not his successor profit by the admonition. Elat-

ed with his rise into royal life, his heart was distended with the same pride, and he even exceeded his predecessor. In this chapter we have a memorable instance of his impiety and extravagance. While the enemy lay ready to break in at his gates, he was feasting his lords, and wasted that time, and detained those hands, which were precious to their country, in debauchery and disorder. Inflamed with wine and riot, he proceeded a more daring length. As an insult to the God of heaven, he commanded to bring the vessels of his temple, and employed them in his carousals. Infatuated man! thou seest not the dangers with which thou art this moment surrounded. Already thy fate is fixed, and only waits for the deep silence of midnight to surprize, and overwhelm thee. And now it approaches. But before so great a reverse, will no pitying spirit give warning, and shall a flourishing and noble empire fall, without one omen to foretel its ruin? Yes, heaven itself, to convince thee, frantic king! that there is a power superior to thine, and to let thee know from what quarter thy destruc-

tion cometh, sends a dreadful forerunner. In the middle of the stately banquet, when all is mirth and song, dreadful apparition! a hand appears, visible, writing on the wall, the doom of Babylon, and its unhappy monarch. Then their joy is damped, fear chills their blood, the king loses his courage at this dreadful sight, and his knees smote one against another. O vain horror! the decree is gone forth, and past recalling. The reverses of this world teach us a fatal truth, that repentance itself may arrive too late to save us. The time was when his humiliation and acknowledgements might have been accepted. They might then have suspended his own fate, and saved his country. The minister of God, whom he had not thought of till the hour of danger, whom he had probably left to languish in obscurity and penury, is now sent for. But to what purpose? Unhappy monarch! not the minister of God, nor the winged ministers from heaven themselves, can retard thy fate one moment. It comes rushing on thee. The prophet can but declare the will of heaven, and retire in mourn-

ing. Yet, like a drowning man, he collects his strength, and struggles against the torrent. He orders purple to be brought, and ornaments of gold, and vainly thinks that he may appease God, by heaping honours upon his servant. Ah Belshazzar! how unhappy is the man who cannot be taught but by his own misfortunes? But a few moments are elapsed since thou set that God at defiance. Secure in thy own strength, thou gavest a challenge even to his power, and wast not afraid to provoke the arm which was already raised against thee. Imprudent man! in that moment of security and riot, when pride swelled thy heart, and every thing was forgotten but the walls of Babylon, where were thy present fears, and thy sober understanding? Hadst thou been sensible of thy situation at that moment, instead of provoking him afresh by new impieties, thou wouldest have laid thy head low, and deprecated, with tears and prayers, the impending desolation. Then was the time, but it was devoted to other purposes, for supplication and repentance. It is now too late. The example of thy pre-

deceffor was unavailing, and thine own fucceeds it. Thy unhappy houfe, which would never be admonifhed, muft at laft fall. Experience, the great teacher, proceeds to his laft experiment: "In that night was Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, flain."

After this history of the houfe of Babylon, and the fate of Belshazzar, the laft of that line of princes, we proceed now to mark the wife leffons which thefe fuggelt; and we will do this by making fome obfervations upon the juftice of his fate, and then confidering, at fome length, the nature of the vices he is charged with.

I know not how it happens, but we feel it to be true, that the misfortunes of the great and happy affect and interest us more than the misfortunes of thofe who are placed in a humble ftation, and even fometimes than our own. Whether it be that the fall is greater, or that we imagine their feelings to be more exquisite, or whatever may be the caufe, the effect is certain. I believe we entertain a miftaken notion of the happinefs of the great.

A crown is subject to many cares, and requires infinite circumspection. Kings have much to lose, and much to answer for. They are subject to great reverses, and their temptations to neglect, or desert their duty, are neither few nor easily resisted. Yet the happiness of thousands depends upon their conduct; and, when they fall, they involve nations in their ruin.—We may trace these observations in the history of Belshazzar. Placed at the head of a great empire, but yesterday we beheld him high and happy, indulging, amidst his concubines and lords, the most sanguine prospects of security and success. In the space of a single night, how entirely is the scene reversed? He is surprised by the enemies whom he affected to despise, and deprived of his empire, and his life.—But the fate of Belshazzar is not to be considered merely as the consequence of his own security. It must be regarded chiefly as a punishment from heaven. “In that night,” the night which he had rendered signal by his riot and impiety, “was Belshazzar, the king “of the Chaldeans, slain.”

With respect to the justice of his fate, I believe there is no man, if he consider the life of this unhappy king, who will not allow his punishment to be necessary. His daring impiety, his unbounded riot, were inconsistent with the serious cares of government, and marked a spirit which was past correction. We may conceive, better than describe, the situation of a people when a madman is invested with authority. Some of the vices which disgraced this monarch, are hardly consistent with the humility of our situation ; but the source from which they proceeded is common to us all. It was pride, my friends, which overthrew him ; a vice which is inspired by prosperity, and is found chiefly in weak minds, who are incapable of much reflection. From this proceeded in a train, security, debauchery, tyranny, and impiety ; the most ruinous and disgraceful habits of the human mind, and the most offensive to the Supreme Being.

A question has arisen, and been warmly agitated among moralists and divines, whether man is a being who is naturally well or ill disposed. Different men, as might be ex-

pected, have viewed this subject differently, and drawn opposite conclusions. If any general conclusion can be established, one would think, that the fair way of arriving at it would be to place him in a situation where he has equally the power of doing good or evil, and *then* observe his conduct. But such a situation is prosperity. A man here has the power of doing both much good, and much evil; and, therefore, if, upon examining the conduct of those whom fortune raises to prosperous situations, we find, as I fear we will, that the good they do bears no proportion to the evil, we might, one would think, infer fairly that man is a being who is disposed to evil. It is no new observation, that any man may bear adversity; but it is not every man, nor indeed many men, who can bear prosperity. It tends strongly to make men forget themselves, and become vain in their imaginations. What is history but a continued narrative of the vices of the prosperous? With what scenes of insolence and waste, of rapine and impiety, of sensuality and folly, of oppression and of bloodshed, have they filled

the earth in all ages? As there is no rule, however, without exceptions, and as I would draw no conclusion which will not be admitted universally, I would content myself here with only inferring, in general, that prosperity corrupts weak minds. Unable to reason deeply, they ascribe their success to something in themselves; and, incapable of much foresight, they apprehend no reverse, and imagine it must last for ever. They are too vain to admit advice, and, at the same time, too weak to resist temptation. As they are placed in an extraordinary point of view, they fancy there must be something really extraordinary about themselves. Forgetting the ends for which power is given, and that *they* possess it, merely because *some* must have it, they behave as if they derived every thing from themselves, and were dependant on themselves alone. Without, then, entering farther into this subject, (which will not, indeed, bear it) it is sufficient to observe, that prosperity is the most dangerous situation in which human nature can be placed. It shews, therefore, the wisdom and care of providence,

in the first place, that so few are necessary in that situation; and, secondly, that by a necessary train of events, these few are perpetually changed, and give place to others. Last of all, the afflictions of life themselves are an instance of the same care; because, however grievous they may be, they are well calculated to abase the pride of man, and recall him to a proper sense of himself, and of his own dependance.

I proceed, then, to consider the vice of pride, that vice which vitiates equally sovereigns and subjects. I shall begin by describing it, and obviating some apologies which have been made for it. From the detail I shall give, it will be evident that vice possesses a malignity with which we are but little acquainted; and that, from the simplest beginnings, it produces uniformly the most extensive and alarming consequences.

All vice may, in general, be defined to be the excess or abuse of some passion, or of some natural sentiment. To animate us to well doing, various premiums are held out to us. One of these is the approbation of our

own minds. When we act a proper part, we are satisfied with ourselves. It is for the same reason that we are pleased with praise from others. Believing them to be sincere, we conceive that we have acted well, and we applaud ourselves. It is the same general sentiment of complacence, which accompanies virtue, and which animates us to the performance of it. The applause of our own minds, whether it arises immediately from our own actions, or from the praise of others, is the result of virtue, and constitutes a very pleasing part of its reward.

But this sentiment, like all the other sentiments and affections of our nature, may be vitiated. The pleasure we feel from well doing, incites us to do well. The pleasure we receive from praise, leads us to do things worthy of praise. Perhaps we may say, that, in a state like this, even a small portion of conceit is necessary to keep us in good humour with ourselves. Hence it is, that every man, generally speaking, even the meanest, values himself upon something or other. It is when our self-value, or self-complacence,

becomes enormous or wrong directed, when it is either utterly disproportioned to its object, or founded upon improper objects, that it is vicious. It then becomes pride, and exhibits immediately the native characters of vice—folly and malignity.

The transition from the virtue to the vice, in this case, as in all others, is easy. The complacence which we feel from our actions is first converted into a conceited opinion of ourselves. Pleased as we are with what we have done, we begin to think there is some remarkable merit in it. We conceive, consequently, highly of ourselves, and think there must be something extraordinary about us. From this point, the folly becomes apparent. The passion we have conceived for ourselves, like all other passions which depend on fancy, multiplies itself fast, and is fed by every thing it meets with. Having departed from the original sentiment, it comes at last no longer to resemble it. It is no longer the complacence which we feel from virtue, or from praise on the account of virtue. It is the simple opinion of our own consequence. Nor

is this opinion connected necessarily with any one set of objects. We bring materials from all quarters to build our tower with. Accustomed to contemplate our own importance, we are at no loss for fancies to support it. We raise it from actions deserving, or undeserving, from the praise of others, or from their censure, from fashion, or from the neglect of fashion, from what the world esteems, or from what it despises, from wisdom, from folly, from virtue, from things which have no connection with virtue, and too often from vice. Riches are one very common source of pride, and yet we may be vain of poverty. Titles are another, and yet we may despise titles. Praise is a third, and yet we may think ourselves above praise. We may even be vain of our humility. We may, in short, be vain of any thing, or of nothing. When we once take a fancy to ourselves, there is no defining it. This is the last stage of it, when we are conceited, and cannot say of what, or give the least reason for it.

The vice of pride is founded on weakness of intellect. It arises obviously from the want

of knowing ourselves, and our own state. Ignorance produces it, and want of capacity renders it incurable. A proper degree of knowledge moderates our ideas of all things, and of ourselves among the rest. If we cannot receive this knowledge, our folly is incurable. The weakest people, therefore, and the least informed, are always the most subject to this vice.—A good deal also may be ascribed to education. Foolish parents make foolish children. In this case, the folly is formed at first, and there is no process.—There is something in this vice very astonishing. That a person should conceive highly of something without him, is natural. But that a creature should take a fancy to itself, is very extraordinary. What is without us we may be forgiven for not knowing perfectly; but one would think, if we knew any thing, that we might know ourselves, at least, so far as to see that we have no great reason to be vain of ourselves.

A distinction has been attempted, by way of apology for it, between pride and vanity. It is alleged that vanity, as distinguished from

pride, is marked by two characters. It consists in that self-importance which arises from the opinion or behaviour of others; and it is generally founded upon trifling circumstances. Pride is satisfied with itself. It is founded upon its own opinion of its own merit, and this merit arises, it is supposed, from great accomplishments. It has no relation to the opinions of others. Hence it is ready to treat them with contempt, when they differ from its own, and with neglect, when they agree to them. Vanity, on the other hand, is always elated with applause, and mortified when it is withheld.—This distinction is merely plausible, and can give no protection to its votaries: I make no doubt that it has been invented by men who had an interest in the invention, and they have employed it accordingly to shelter their own imperfections.—First of all, it will not follow, though these vices were different, that they are not both vices; nor will it follow, that they may not even be united, (I believe they generally are) in the same person. But, in the next place, it is a distinction without a difference, for there is

really no difference. The sentiment itself, is, in all cases, the same. It is the same opinion of our own consequence, whatever we derive it from, whether from the praises of others, or from our own reflections. With respect to the one being founded upon great, and the other upon little accomplishments, that depends upon whom we make the judge. If we take his own word, every man of this character thinks his own accomplishments great, and that his pride is proper. While the world may be wondering what he is vain of, he is generally at no loss himself about it.— But it is of more importance to describe the difference between pride and greatness of mind, which it would seem to be the intention of these distinguishers to represent as the same qualities. Greatness of mind is that disposition which leads a man to great actions, and sublime sentiments. Pride is that disposition which leads a man to contemplate his own actions and sentiments, whatever they are, with self-consequence. A great mind never reflects upon its own merit. A proud, or vain one, reflects upon nothing else. The

former conceives noble sentiments, and expresses them in his actions, without thinking of the abilities which produced them. The latter can conceive no sentiments or actions without attending principally to this circumstance. When a great man performs a worthy action, he does not think that he has done any thing extraordinary. A proud man is wholly engrossed with this. What a difference is there between these dispositions? How mean is the one when compared with the other? A great mind is superior to a proud one, as far as a generous temper is superior to a selfish one. A proud, or vain man, is engrossed with what is below a great man's notice. When he performs any action, he first of all makes an uncommon merit of it with himself, and this makes him insolent to others. What a pity is this? What a pity it is that a man should sully an action, which may in itself be laudable, with this ridiculous ingredient? What occasion is there for pride in any case? Or where is the advantage of it? May not a man act in the best manner without having his mind perpetually engrossed

with his own actions? Or, is acting well such a stranger to his nature, that he cannot do it, in any instance, without giving himself credit for it? Must he be perpetually thinking of himself, and his own consequence? His actions and character both, allowing their merit to be ever so great, would certainly suffer nothing by the want of this ridiculous circumstance.—I will even go farther, and venture to affirm, that pride, admitting the distinction which it assumes to itself, is both more dangerous, and more contemptible than vanity. Vanity can, at any time, be checked. As it is founded upon the good opinion of others, the withdrawing of this is all that is necessary to humble it. Pride is founded upon itself, and cannot be humbled but by its own destruction.—It is also more contemptible. The vain man has this to say for himself, that, if he thinks wrong, he thinks but what others think. The proud man is lifted up with his own opinion. He entertains ideas of himself, which, for any thing he knows, no body ever thought of but himself. There is a portion, however small, of modesty mixed with the one character.

The folly of the other is pure, and admits no apology.—And if pride, in its best state, be so little a sentiment, how contemptible must it be, when it is founded upon little objects,—such as, we may observe, the common possessions of this world may in general be said to be? The mind which is continually employed in contemplating these objects, must become little as the objects it contemplates. The man who has performed great achievements, has some apology to plead, if he give himself a little credit for them. We excuse his conceit, for the sake of his real merit. But what merit has he to plead who is proud, and yet has done nothing; nothing that is of any importance to the world, or that indicates any uncommon abilities in himself? The man, however, who has performed great achievements, or who is capable of performing them, is not the character who is most subject to this folly. The vain, or proud man, is generally the man who thinks himself possessed of something remarkable, and is not.

This sentiment, absurd in itself, will appear to greater disadvantage still, if we consider

the effects of it. Here the vice begins to appear, and to manifest itself. We shall treat these effects under three heads; as they respect God; as they respect our fellow creatures; and as they respect ourselves. Considered in itself, it appears rather a folly; but, observed in its operation, we immediately discern the virulence, working, as usual, with dreadful symptoms; vitiating the subject, and producing the most shocking scenes of misery among the species.

I. PRIDE is an enemy to the religious spirit. It affects, in the most material manner, the most important of our connections, our connection with the Almighty. It leads us to forget, and finally to throw off our dependence upon him. It has a manifest tendency to obstruct the intercourse, and destroy the relations, which subsist between God and created natures. It is opposite to those habits of submission and acknowledgement which result from our situation, and by which alone we can maintain an intercourse with the great parent of the world. Pride is the natural e-

nemy of subordination. It destroys the habits of respect, and leads us to hate, or to avoid, the presence of superior beings.—It is remarkable, that this is the vice which is ascribed to the angels who kept not their first estate. Their impiety is supposed to have proceeded from pride, which had inspired them at last with an envy of supreme power. Nor will this appear improbable, if we consider the nature of this vice, and to what extreme folly it will lead. Taking into the idea the obscurity which, so far as it respects themselves, most necessarily hang upon the origin of all created beings, their story admits a natural solution. Pride is a vice of that sort, that we can hardly at last conceive effects too absurd for it. The scenes which we are told it produced in heaven, allowing for the difference of circumstances, it is continually repeating upon the earth.—If there be a God, we ought to reverence him. This consequence follows forcibly, and directly. It is a proposition which stands upon its own basis, and does not even depend upon revelation. There is an undoubted relation be-

tween God and his creation. If existence is bestowed by the one, duty becomes the other. If the one afford protection, the other is bound to gratitude. If Deity be a perfect being, he is the object of respect and homage. If men be imperfect creatures, humility is proper to them. If we live under a supreme, superintending government, we owe submission and attachment to it. These are the instincts of nature, as well as the first dictates of reason. How monstrous is the mind which wants these affections? I believe it would not be difficult to shew that pride is connected with Atheism. The mind which is self-sufficient must be uneasy at the thought of an obligation. The man who is lifted up with his own importance, must certainly never reflect that himself and his importance both depend entirely upon the pleasure of another. If he reflected upon this, he could not be elated. The proud man, however, must know this, and he must wish it were not true. To what impious conclusions will not this disposition lead a man, especially if he possess high passions, or any portion of ingenuity? It led Belshaz-

far to acts of the most frantic impiety. I make no doubt that this insolent monarch, when he ordered the sacred vessels to be produced, and applied to common purposes, meant an insult to the Deity. Inflamed with pride and wine, it is probable that he was boasting, among his women and lords, of the strength of his empires, of his impregnable walls, and unexhausted resources: till, as the madness increased, he called for the vessels of the temple, drank out of them, with his concubines and wives, in contempt of divine power, and challenged even the God of Jerusalem to overthrow him.—I believe there are few here who are in danger of proceeding to such excess as Belshazzar. But, in general, we may affirm, that, of all the vices, pride is the most inconsistent with the religious temper. If it stops short of absolute impiety, it leads at least to forgetfulness of God, and of our dependence upon him.—The mind of the vain man is, first of all, engrossed with the objects of his vanity. He has neither room, therefore, nor inclination for religious objects. Not to mention how much it is be-

neath him, and how necessary it is that he should distinguish himself.—The weakness of mind also, out of which this vice arises, is inimical to religion. The mind which is conceited of little objects can have no capacity for large ones.—The sentiments, in the next place, cannot consist together. The religious temper is founded in meekness, and in humility. This follows evidently from our situation in the universe, from the disproportion of power between our Creator and ourselves, and from the nature of our connection with him. But to these pride is adverse.—In general, it will be sufficient to shew us that this quality must, in its own nature, be inconsistent with the religious character, to reflect that the attention of a proud, or vain man, is wholly engrossed with second causes. This is, indeed, one natural, and immediate issue of the vice. Whatever success may attend him, the man's vanity continually leads him to refer it entirely to the exertions, or causes immediately producing it, (that is to himself) and he looks no farther. Hence more vanity. Hence, too, the very remarkable fact

which we see takes place in this world, that irreligion prevails most where we would least expect to find it, among the opulent classes, that is, among those who are most obliged to God, and have apparently been most favoured by him. The vanity which arises out of their situation leads them to attach every thing to second causes. These continually interpose between them and the first cause, and keep him out of sight altogether. Here is a curious process,—pride leading to irreligion, and irreligion, in its turn, increasing pride, and both acting and re-acting upon each other, and multiplying the folly in infinitum. This discovers to us, among the proud and the vain, an evil of indefinite magnitude, an accumulating source of degeneracy.—We may conclude, then, upon certain principles, that pride leads us away from God, and from the regards we owe him. It has the effect, in the very first instance, to turn our minds from him, and to leave him out of our calculations. For how, indeed, in common good sense, can it be otherwise? Will a man, whose thoughts are wholly engrossed with himself, ever think

of his maker? Will a man, who is intoxicated with his own sufficiency, be sensible, as he ought to be, of the need which he has of the Divine protection? Or will a man, whose heart is lifted up with pride and self-importance, ever find his gratification in the humble duties of acknowledgement, and of repentance? There is a contradiction almost of terms in the supposition. He may perform these duties, he may think that he is performing them, but he cannot perform them from the proper motive. He wants the dispositions which should accompany them. A proud man possesses not the qualities which constitute the religious character. Of all the tempers of the mind, the religious is at the greatest distance from self-sufficiency. I mean not to depress human nature, but it is a just, as it is a very common remark, that we will not seek God, if we are not first sensible of our own weakness.—Pride is also adverse to the state under which religion places us, the state of discipline. The great duty of the present state is to improve our nature. But to this pride is inimical. A man, who supposes himself

perfect enough already, will not think of improving himself. He will not receive advice, who thinks he needs none, nor rectify defects, who never suspects he has any.—Besides all this, there is something in the nature of this vice itself which vitiates the mind, and renders it regardless. Every vain man is guilty of a double act of practical impiety. He ascribes his success to his own abilities, and he reflects not that his abilities proceed from God. In both cases, he wants the natural affections of his state, and adopts sentiments which are inconsistent with it. Impiety is often the result, but irreligion is one of the natural attributes of pride. The proud man is led naturally to leave God out of his system.—In every view, then, the vice of pride is adverse to the religious temper. So far as the reverence of superior powers is a proper principle, so far as religion is a natural sentiment, or a proper rule, so far is the vain man an unnatural, and foolish character. Remove these, you take away the most important part of human knowledge, and the best rule of human life. You mask our real situation, and

invest man with a fictitious character, which he cannot support, and which becomes finally pernicious to him. You destroy the most important of his connections, his connection with God, and open a wide door to every species of enormity.

II. THE vice of pride is not only inconsistent with the religious principle, it not only destroys the most important of our connections, our connection with the Supreme Parent, but it is inconsistent with the terms upon which we ought to live with one another. It is repugnant to that system of liberal and equal policy which is the glory of our species, and under which alone our nature can receive its proper cultivation. It is calculated for a state of slaves and masters, and is subversive of the liberal connections of an equal, and free society.—We may regard this vice under two views, as it affects the manners, and as it affects the conduct. Throughout both these, it preserves the same character, and exhibits the same offensive effects. It divests men equally of the manners, and the qualities of

their most improved state. A vain man considers himself as far exalted above others. This is the principle of the vice. It is the original fancy, and it is continually discovering itself. He regards the rest of mankind as a species of inferior creatures. His attentions are centered in himself, and he considers others as either below his notice, or as born for his convenience. He is, therefore, obviously a selfish, and a repulsive character. The natural expression of pride is insolence. A proud or vain man, deserves not the regards of others. He does not interest himself in them. He has no real attachment but to himself. He may do good from vanity, but doing good is not his character. The sympathies of benevolence, the affections which interest us in our kind, cannot mix with his dispositions.—But pride is never more absurd than when it disguises its native ruggedness, and attempts to conciliate popularity. This produces the most insolent of all sentiments, the pride of condescension. If a man of this description mixes with other men, he would have it regarded as a piece of prodigious good-

ness, and often labours to be agreeable for no other reason, but that he may value himself, and hear others value him, upon his affability. Thus his virtues themselves become the ministers of vice, and he draws a subject of pride from his humility. What a monstrous perversion is this of the human character? It is this again which converts life into affectation, and fills the world with insincerity.—But this vice appears in its full deformity when it is connected with power. This gives it the means of displaying itself; and, in this case, it usually displays itself in acts of mischief. We may observe, that pride may exist in any state, but it is more usually the effect of prosperity. This state is most exposed to it, and affords more opportunities of indulging it. A proud man has generally some object in his eye on which he builds his vanity, and outward prosperity is as common a cause as any. We naturally connect pride and power together; and there is no reason why we should do so, but because we are accustomed, I suppose, to see them go together. Agreeable to this observation is the description of

the sins of Sodom: "Behold," says the Prophet, "this was the iniquity of Sodom, pride, fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness." We see here the connection between pride and fullness of bread distinctly marked. In this situation, it manifests itself in deeds of insolence and oppression. This is so uniformly the effect of it in these circumstances, that, if a man who possesses power behave but with common attention to the people he converses with, he is admired. In *him* it is thought a virtue to abstain from injury. If a man who has the power of doing ill, forbears it, he is an eminent character. If he *can* oppress, and does not, the world gives him great credit. How easy is it for a great man to be amiable? And yet, what merit has he if he is so? So much for what is expected from men in power. Pride and power conjoined, (and in our frail nature they often are) compose the very worst character. They lead uniformly to deeds of insolence and injury. And how can it be otherwise? How is it possible that a proud man should not be injurious? A man who entertains a high

opinion of himself, must necessarily regard others with contempt; and we are not naturally disposed to treat those whom we despise with much ceremony. We are not disposed to pay a proper attention either to their feelings as men, or to their rights as citizens.— We may observe also, under this head, that a man of this character is incapable of gratitude. He possesses not the sentiments which are proper to his situation. He is not formed for a state where we all depend upon one another. You cannot oblige a proud man. He considers every benefit which can be conferred upon him as his due. It would hurt him to think that he had received a favour.—In all these views, pride is a disagreeable and offensive quality. The proud man is the natural enemy of society. Pride cannot consist with the virtues of the improved life. It breaks the natural connections of the species. In their manners, it makes men insolent, or, if not insolent, deceitful;—in their conduct and deeds, oppressive. For the virtues of the citizen, it substitutes the solitary temper of the despot. For the civilized manners of the man, it gives

us the overbearing and boisterous dispositions of the ruffian. It leads uniformly, wherever it has the means, to insolence and injury.— It is also opposite to the liberal policy of the species. In general, we may observe, that pride is the natural quality of the barbarian, not of the cultivated citizen. Being the result of ignorance, the more enlightened the society is, the less vanity will be found in it. It is the native plant of an unenlightened society, and of a violent government. Contrary to what we would expect from first appearances, the proud man is the natural instrument of the tyrant. So near are the extremes of pride and meanness, and so far is this vice removed from real greatness of mind, that nothing is more common than to see a proud man submit abjectly to the tyranny of another, and to every species of indignity, that he may have the pleasure, in his turn, of tyrannising. This is, indeed, the state into which he naturally falls; it is the natural bargain which he makes, and the only species of society for which he is properly calculated. Meeting resistance from below, he is under the neces-

sity of applying to the powers above him. The vice of pride goes to establish a system of oppression, and to place men universally in a state of hostility to one another.

III. Pride not only destroys our connections with the Supreme Being, and with one another; it not only leads us to neglect God, and abuse men; but it leads us to neglect, vitiate, and finally ruin ourselves.—First of all, this vice, like all other vices, vitiates us. We have already observed, that it destroys the two great classes of our affections, the affections which we ought to have for God and for our species. So far it vitiates. But it has a more extensive effect. It acts against the whole man, and vitiates him on all sides. Pride takes many directions, but I will speak of those which are most natural to it.—Boastfulness is a property of the vice. The proud are, first, boastful. They have, consequently, a continual tendency to depart from truth. “They speak,” as the Apostle expresses it, great “swelling words of vanity.” The evil here operates in two directions. The same dispo-

sition which leads them to magnify themselves, leads them to diminish others. They depart from truth in both cases; till, at last, by repeated deviations, they lose the sense, and cease to perceive the value of it.—Malice is a property of this vice. The proud are malicious. They view those above them with envy, and those below them with satisfaction. Their equals they are never lucky enough to meet with. What a source of malignity here opens to us? But they delight chiefly to contemplate their inferiors. This feeds their vanity, and gives them pleasure by comparison. For the same reason, they are pleased with the disappointments of people, and bear nothing so ill as to see a man rise and prosper in the world. This is one certain mark of the folly. They are for keeping every man down that they can possibly.—The proud are revengeful. Important in their own minds, if you touch their folly, or offend their consequence, they are implacable.—The proud are hard-hearted. Accustomed to receive satisfaction from contemplating the distresses of mankind, and exercising themselves often in

procuring these distresses, they lose gradually the common sympathies of their species, and become fitted for deeds of hardness and oppression.—I have already observed that they are an ungrateful kind. They cannot be obliged.—The proud are hypocrites. It is not often convenient for them to discover all the bad passions which actuate them.—The proud make God and men their enemies. They are obnoxious to God. Divested of the virtues of their species, and of the affections which are proper to their state, can it be supposed that the supreme and equal parent of the universal family can regard them with complacency? Without truth, filled with malice, revengeful, hardened to men, and disregarding God, it is evident that they are highly vitiated, and that they are in a state which calls for correction, or for punishment.—They are obnoxious to men. We may observe, that it is of the greatest consequence even to our success in life that we possess the esteem and the love of one another. Men who act in society, must often act together. We can seldom, indeed, in any situation, act

by ourselves. Every individual touches many others, and every movement which he makes gives an impulse to the whole body of people who are connected with him. He not only acts upon them, but, when the movement is communicated, they all act on him, and influence him. The event of our schemes, therefore, depends much on others; and it would be very extraordinary, if any man, whatever may be his talents, could succeed generally contrary to every body. But the proud are always in this situation. Unsocial, arrogant, malicious, and, when they can, oppressive, they make mankind their enemies. They act, therefore, continually in the midst of a multitude who are interested to defeat them. Such is their situation, that there are always numbers of people to whom their fall would be agreeable, and who watch the opportunities of procuring it. But, in this unstable state, where every situation totters, these opportunities are frequent; and hence it happens, that the proud man, when he least expects it, generally receives an impulse, from some quarter or other, which oversets him.—

This is the more likely to happen from another cause, that pride has the effect generally to inspire a presumptuous security and contempt of danger, which at once relax our vigilance and our exertions, and expose us to misfortunes.—But, besides the external shocks to which it is liable, pride contains a source of ruin within itself. We have already observed, as one of its natural properties, that it is boastful and ostentatious. Moving, as it wishes to do, amidst the parade of life, and prone to outward pomp and demonstration, it tends naturally to a disproportioned expenditure. To supply that expenditure, the proud are often obliged to gather and sweep from all quarters; and it is at this period that they exhibit the contradictory, but very common character, of a covetous, mean rapacity, united to an ostentatious and childish prodigality. But there is this difference between the two operations of gathering and dispersing, that, in gathering, a man meets with obstacles; whereas, in dispersing, he is so far from meeting with obstacles, that every body assists him. A man, therefore, who sets himself to both,

must disperse faster than he can gather; and hence it follows, by an evident calculation, that pride has a constant operation to destroy its own funds, and to lead the vain, weak man to his destruction.—The operation begun, goes farther. The waste and show which the proud are first led into from vanity, they soon conceive a passion for on their own account; and this becomes finally so strong, that it either renders them blind to what is before them, or infatuates them to that degree that they are unable to relinquish it even when they see the consequences, and when ruin stares them in the face.—The same process leads them to sensuality. Indulging at first from vanity, they soon come to indulge for the sake of indulging, and acquire gross vile habits.—Arrived at this point, the motion becomes rapid; and, as it draws near the end, is accelerated. The symptoms become violent, and manifest themselves on all sides. Many different effects now appear together. Stimulated by vanity, and pressed for resources to support it, they begin to feel the motions of dishonesty. Truth they had formerly parted with. The

character totters, and the man breaks on all sides.—We observed, that pride is naturally presuming and self-sufficient. This leads to other effects. Confidence in our own abilities, or situation, leads us naturally to security. Security, besides exposing to external shocks, gives habits of indolence; and these again have a double issue. They operate both against the virtue and the natural faculties.—They act against the virtue. Idleness is the natural soil where all the rank vices gather.—They act against the natural faculties. The mind becomes incapable of application from the want of applying, and it becomes weak from the want of being exercised. The vices which it collects hasten the effect. They relax the mind and body, and render both feeble. Pride itself destroys the sense. Working continually upon one object, and that a little object, and beset by so many bad passions, it contracts the views and impairs the judgment. I should not go too far if I said that it produces a sort of madness, not perhaps universally obvious, but very evident to sober, discerning people. In fact, it has often

issued in plain madness.—Nothing can place in a stronger light the virulence of the vicious quality, and the unknown nature even of the objects we are most conversant with, than the history of pride. One could not conceive that a single vice could take so many directions, or have so many issues. From a small seed, hardly at first perceptible, it expands itself on all sides, until at last it spoils, and breaks down the whole character. There is not a virtue which it does not destroy, nor a vice, or meanness, which it does not foster. At first, it appears rather a folly. We discern merely a small seed of conceit, which we scarce think of. We are rather, indeed, pleased to see it. The sight of so many fantastic figures, strutting about, and all of them seemingly happy, with one idea or other, is rather an agreeable spectacle. We regard it as an useful fancy, and, when we observe the objects upon which men value themselves, we think it lucky that they are so easily pleased.—By and by, we discern the vice. As it acquires power, or finds opportunity, it expands itself. We see first the curious spec-

tacle of one part of mankind despising the other : We see them next oppressing one another ; and, lastly, we discover them destroying themselves. The virulence is then ripened, and the effects of it appear on all sides. What is remarkable, it takes often more than one generation to produce the effect. A man, who has once been active does not all at once forget himself. He acquires conceit gradually as he gathers riches ; his former habits operate, and, at times at least, repel the folly. But the process ends not here. The seed, which appeared late, and which reached not maturity in himself, appears anew in his offspring. We can account for few natural operations, but I believe it is a matter of experiment that the parent generally transfuses a portion even of his acquired qualities to his posterity. But, independent of this, he is careful to implant them. Whatever he values himself upon, it is natural for him to give his children. Here, then, he plants it early, that it may come forward with their growth and flourish. Cherished in so kindly a soil, and having time before it, it multiplies to his

wishes, and produces a rank harvest. Irreligion, insolence, lies, malice, ingratitude, hypocrisy, habits of ruinous waste, and sensuality, manifest themselves. They destroy all energy and exertion, and lead to certain ruin. This is the precise train in which the events of this world ly. It is the natural and certain succession of our affairs. The operation is by no means accidental. It is so certain, that it might almost be subjected to calculation. Hence the causes of the reverses of individuals; and of an appearance still more important, which presses itself upon our observation, that families, once raised to opulence, commonly end in imbecility.—From the same cause arise the revolutions of nations. Vice produces the same effects in the great, as in the little system; only, as the connections become more important and extensive, the effects are, in proportion, more ruinous and universal. There never was a juster maxim than the maxim of Solomon, “before honour is humility, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Independent of the morality of the dispositions themselves, the one has a

necessary tendency to relieve our affairs, and the other to distress them. Humility renders us watchful and active; while pride relaxes our exertions, and leads us back to ruin. Human affairs seem to be so ordered, that we can neither rise too high, nor sink too low. There is an invisible power placed at both extremes, which checks our progress, and prevents us from advancing too far. The middle path is the path which is marked by nature, and which leads to happiness.

I shall now conclude this subject, with an improvement of it, and this I shall make, by collecting, and stating shortly, some of the chief conclusions which arise from it.

It is remarkable, that the vice of pride is represented everywhere in the scriptures as peculiarly offensive to God. He is described (as indeed we may suppose) looking down, from the height of heaven, with equal eyes, upon the earth. He observes the humble with complacence. He marks those who set themselves above their kind. He expresses, in innumerable, strong passages, which it is unnecessary to quote, his displeasure at them.

If we reflect upon the history which we have given of this vice, this will not appear surprising. Men of this description depart from their station in the system, and want the proper affections of their state. Besides being unnatural in itself, the vice of pride goes directly to place the species in their very worst state. It plants the seed within which degenerates them. It is not surprising that the Supreme Parent should view, with indignation, a set of men setting themselves up among his works, wanting all the affections which their state requires, neglecting God, despising their species, vitiating and ruining their own natures.

Let me, then, first of all, warn you against this vice, from the consideration of the displeasure of God,—that displeasure which brings down the lofty looks of man, and lays the pride of empires low. Look around you. Lift your eyes to the immensity of his works. Contemplate the magnificence of his empire. Turn then to yourselves. Think what a small point in the system you are. View the infinite disproportion, and be convinced that

pride was not made for man. Consider him next as the equal, and indulgent parent, and reflect what he must think of those who assume in his family. Then, if you can, turn your eyes within you. Know yourselves. Weak, and tottering in the midst of powerful elements, and loaded with your infirmities, you are exposed to much misery. Mixed with bad passions, and tending strongly to degenerate, it becomes you to be sober. Watch over yourselves with care, for you know not how vile you may become. A single bad propensity, unchecked or fostered, will spread throughout you, and corrupt, and break down the whole man. Vice leads to numerous issues. Reflect that the judgments of God are abroad, protecting his creatures in their rights, redressing wrong, and humbling whatever would exalt itself. From the angels that rebelled, to the meanest human empire, or the most contemptible human individual, the united result of universal experience is, that pride must have a fall. Vice indulged becomes one of nature's irresistible powers. It is an unknown quality, which

works by unknown means, to certain issues. It becomes you to guard yourselves with care against an energy so active, penetrating, and malignant, that individuals and empires, private fortunes, and public establishments, are equally dissolved before it.

Allow me, here, to address myself to parents. The condition of the rising world depends in a great measure upon the lessons which they give to their young families. Beware of implanting the seed of pride. It will become a family-tree, which, fostered by the hand of the parent, and by the rankness of the soil, will push forth numerous branches, and at last perforate, and spoil the whole character. Be convinced, that the very worst little lesson you can give them, is, that they are better than others. It is a lesson, depend upon it, which they never will forget, and which will give the character to their whole minds, and to their life. Teach them to know themselves, the system in which they move, and the Sovereign under whom they act. Endeavour to make them comprehend that all men belong to one universal family,

and that they owe one another love. Teach them the great compend of duty,—justice, mercy, and humility. Shew them that humility is a first principle, and that they will not do justice, nor love mercy, unless they walk humbly. Teach them the small value of the present state, where they are merely tenants of a day, and that it depends on themselves if they shall ever rise above it. * Make them understand that the situations of life are situations of mere convenience, and that there is no real happiness or respect but that which arises from acting well. Let them know that this is the great law of their nature; discourage them from making foolish comparisons, or from collecting news of themselves, and lead them at once beyond the praise of men to the applause of God. By this means, you will inform their minds, and give them a solidity which will enable them to resist vice and frivolity. Above all teach them by your example. Despise vain fancies, and study to be wise, and recollected. Observe carefully the first seeds of pride and insolence in yourselves. Stifle them, if possible, at the begin-

ning. Extinguish them immediately, before they have time to ferment, and to expand themselves. Look not merely at the seed itself. Contemplate it in its effects. Trace it through the character. Study the station in which God has placed your species, and cultivate the proper affections of your kind. Fancy not that any thing you can meet with here can exalt, or change you. To be vain of the goods of this world, is placing too great a value on them. To conceive a passion for ourselves, is folly. To see one piece of corruption preferring itself to another, is a humbling spectacle. But to carry the fancy so far as to quarrel about it, to go the length of insulting one another, and even of forgetting, or setting up against your maker, what is it but madness? If we could believe ourselves always in the right, what an idea must it give us of our species? One half the pleasure of mankind seems to arise from their despising one another. There is a regular gradation of contempt, which goes from the highest to the very lowest station in society. There is hardly a man so torpid or depressed, but has in-

genuity enough to discover somebody whom he thinks he may despise. What an absurd scene does the vain world present to us? They resemble so many men standing upon their tip-toes, and striving who shall be tallest. And then the devices which they use to raise themselves, and, (which is the great object) to convince people that they are raised! the claims which they set forth, and the figures into which they cast themselves! Did any of the inferior species play as many tricks, or make as many grimaces, as the human, we would conclude them mad, and think it our duty to extirpate them. Yet with us it is a serious business, which we go gravely to work with, which employs all our powers, and calls forth all our bad passions.

In a former part of this discourse, we touched a speculation to which we may now recall your attention, and it is, that this whole subject affords the clearest proofs of divine government, and of a well ordered world. The order of the world requires that some should be possessed of power. This accounts for the inequality of mankind. But, as prosperity

corrupts the species, if power remained always in the same hands, the consequence would be, that the management of the earth, both in its greater and lesser departments, would be entailed at last upon a set of vitiated, or useless characters, from whom there was no relief, the disgrace of their species, and the very worst members of their society. To provide, therefore, against this degeneracy, it is ordered by a wise Providence that prosperity, as soon as it arrives at the vicious point, should correct itself, and be the cause of its own ruin. On the other hand, it is reasonable that the active qualities should be rewarded. Humility, therefore, which produces these qualities, leads to honour. By this means, the worthless are successively displaced, and the active, deserving part of the society, are brought successively forward into their room. By this means also power, if it be a good, is made to circulate through the society, and that inequality which is necessary in the present imperfection, is, in some measure, corrected. A number of great effects are made to flow from one cause; and the properties of the earth, which regulate,

and finally corrupt the species, are continually held out as premiums to that active exertion, upon which all the comfort and respect of the human societies depend. The same process takes place in nations, and they are exalted or depressed successively by the same rule. The only defect that remains, is, that we think this operation slow. Nature moves with majestic sublimity, and proceeds towards her end deliberately ; while we are impatient, and our views, like our duration here, contracted. Yet, in flagrant cases, even this is corrected, and the event hastened, as in the instance of Belshazzar, by the immediate interposition of Deity himself. Thus the whole system is provided with proper checks, and one part of it wisely balanced by another. In the moral, as in the natural world, there is no waste, and corruption itself is made the means of regenerating. How perfect are the works of God! His empire alone is everlasting, because it is subject to no corruption, and his dominion remaineth the same throughout all generations.

Thus I have discoursed upon a copious subject, the subject of human vanity. I have

treated the history of Belshazzar, and the viti-
tation which arises from prosperity. Every
state of life has its vices, because every state
may be abused, but prosperity seems to be the
state in which we make the wildest work. It
is humiliating for our species, and, at the same
time, shews, in a strong light, the malignity
of the vicious quality, that it is dangerous to
do us good, and that the Supreme Parent can-
not bestow even the little premiums of this
life upon us, without the hazard of our abus-
ing ourselves with them.

These reflections will at least convince us,
that we are at present in a very immature
stage of our being. It requires but little to
put us wrong. The most minute causes af-
fect our minds. The most minute causes are
sufficient to involve us in folly and in vice.
But the amazing circumstance is, that causes,
which appear to us minute, produce conti-
nually the most extensive effects; and that,
though the objects which are given to us to
exercise us, are in themselves of small account,
the habits which arise from them, and the

consequences which they produce upon our state, are of the most alarming magnitude.

To conclude, seeing that the histories of scripture were recorded for our sakes, suffer them, my brethren, to produce their just effect. I have selected one memorable instance from these precious monuments, for your information. The more dangerous any situation is, we ought to guard ourselves the more against it. The lives of the greatly prosperous afford the most striking lessons to our species. Let the history of Belshazzar teach us, not to presume upon prosperity, nor to let the season of youth and of exertion pass unimproved. Which of us can read his fate, and not tremble for his own? The time, Christians! requires haste. The day of life, and especially of youth and spirits, is uncertain. There is a point in the history of every man, at which even repentance may be vain. There are three circumstances in the life of this unhappy king, which, I fear, may be very generally applied, and which ought seriously to alarm us. He would not be warned by the fate of others:—he was destroyed in the

moment of security :—and, the stroke fell in the very act of iniquity, and overwhelmed him. Ah, poor humanity ! running for ever the same round, and for ever repeating, or exhibiting, in vain, the same lessons and examples !

SERMON V.

On THEFT.

EXODUS xx. 15.

Thou shalt not steal.

THE great object of society is to protect the virtuous part of mankind against the ill-disposed. Natural liberty may be defined to be the power of doing what we please. This is the only perfect liberty; and, if human nature were also perfect, we might be permitted to enjoy it. We might then safely be allowed to do what we please; because, in that case, we would never incline to do any thing but what was right. It is because our nature is imperfect that our natural liberty must be contracted. We cannot be allowed the liberty of doing as we please, because, if we were, we would often do what is wrong.

Every man, therefore, who lives in society, surrenders virtually this part of his liberty to the society. He gives up no right, because no man has a right to do evil; but I shall express myself accurately when I say that he renounces a power. By entering into society, he renounces, in effect, the power of doing wrong. He lives in society upon these terms, and upon these terms alone he is entitled to the advantages of it.

It proceeds from the same imperfection, and is the next step in the science of legislation, that it is necessary to ascertain, and publish, with as much precision as possible, what is right, and what is wrong. This prevents weak men from mistaking, and bad men from pretending to mistake, their duty; and, for the same reason, it becomes necessary to ascertain, and publish, not only the crimes of society, but their respective penalties.

The rights, and crimes of mankind, have been divided, and arranged variously by moralists and lawyers. Men of science, when they can produce no new ideas, amuse themselves frequently with inventing new names,

or with making new arrangements. The only difference which religion knows, and the only general rule which can be laid down upon this subject, is, that some vices are more gross than others, or attended with circumstances of more enormity.

The divine Legislator, in the passage before us, condescends upon the three most enormous crimes of society,—murder, adultery, and theft. He arranges them together, as being nearly of the same size. To most of his other precepts, he adds some reason to enforce them; but, with respect to these crimes, he adds no reason, their enormity being sufficiently obvious.

I propose, through divine assistance, to deliver a discourse upon the last of these,—Theft; and, that I may be enabled to arrange my ideas the more perspicuously, I shall observe the following method.

I shall, first, make some observations upon the nature of that vice itself; describe the causes from which it commonly proceeds; and, lastly, I shall collect, and inculcate, the

conclusions which arise from the whole argument.

I am, first, to make some observations upon the nature of the vice of theft.

Let me begin, then, by remarking the meanness of this vice. Every decent man, if he has a pride in any thing, has a pride in appearing upon an equal footing at least with the members of his own society. He wishes to be like his neighbours, and to possess that share of attention and respect which are bestowed upon people of his own station. A virtuous ambition will sometimes lead him to aspire beyond this ; but mere common decency, or, if it be a better expression, mere common shame, will lead him to act up to it. He will not choose to be supported by his neighbours, but will shew them, if possible, that he can support himself. He will not only wish to make the same appearance they do, but to be indebted to himself for it. He will wish to be as well clothed, lodged, and fed, as they are ; or, at least, he will wish them to be convinced that he can be so if he chooses. He will not choose to be indebted for the

mere means of living to any man ; but to depend upon himself, and be obliged, as much as possible, to himself. He will wish, in short, to shew his fellow citizens, that they can do nothing which he cannot do ; and that, where the common respect of a man is concerned, he is both disposed, and able, to make the same exertions. While his health and hands are left him, he will account it the most reproachful objection which can be made to him, that he is a burden to the society, or to any individual of it. Even when old age and infirmity overtake him, it will be his boast to have it known that he has made some provision for them ; or, if he has been prevented from doing this, it will be his consolation at least to say, that while his health and strength were with him, he yielded to none, and that, if he had not met with unforeseen misfortunes, he would even now be living upon himself, without depending upon any man.— Such is the description of the respected citizen, and it will enable us to form some idea of the thief. The thief is the character which is, in every respect, the reverse of this. He

neither possesses respect, nor seems to wish for it. He has an evil, and a base mind, which has no sense of honour nor of credit. Instead of aspiring to his own place in society, he aspires to no place ; instead of making it his pride to depend upon himself, he thinks of nothing but how he may subsist himself upon others. The appearance, the riches, and the active industry of his neighbour, give him no ambition ; he does not wish to be like him, but is contented with what he can pick from him. In short, he wants the proper feelings of a man, his mind is mean and base, and his habits of life contemptible.

The second remark we may make upon the vice of theft, is, that it is not only mean itself, but inconsistent with the very existence, and great end of society. Man is a being who, during at least one third part of his existence, cannot help himself. In his infancy, and old age, he cannot gain a subsistence ; and, if he were left to himself during these periods, he must perish from mere want of necessities. It becomes necessary, therefore, for the preservation of the species, that a provi-

sion should be made for these two portions of his being; and nature, which is another name for providence, hath provided him accordingly with the most adequate means for that purpose. She hath endowed him with a principle, which, like every other principle, may be abused; but which, when rightly managed, and directed towards its proper object, answers the best end, and is necessary to his preservation. This is the desire of *boarding*; or, in other words, a propensity which he feels to store up, and reserve, whatever he has more than he can presently consume. He possesses this principle in common with some other species, who, having the same wants, are also observed to make the same provision. In allusion to this, is that direction in scripture, "Go to the ant, thou sluggard! consider her ways, and be wise. Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." The only thing which it is necessary to observe farther upon this, is, that man is directed to do this by his reason, as well as instinct. With respect to him,

therefore, it becomes a moral duty, and indeed many other duties depend upon it. It becomes, in his hands, a fund, not only for his own wants, but for the endowments of his family, the dispensing of his charities, and the fulfilling of his engagements.

To protect these stores, to secure to every man the full use and possession of his own exerted industry, is the great end of society. The security of life itself, is rather a secondary object, because it is generally for the sake of property that life is invaded. But in vain has nature directed, and scripture taught us, to make provision for our necessities, if the thief or robber are allowed to intercept it. In vain will we select our superfluities, and reserve them for our future occasions, if the base part of our species are allowed to pick our stores, and possess themselves of the fruits of our labours. Nor would the mischief cease with the first act. The plundered party, having no hope of justice or redress, would either abandon his labours in despair, or plunder the next weaker. The misery would spread and aggravate ; power would become the only

rule of right; and our wretched species, armed against each other, and deprived of the means of living, would perish by mutual injuries.—In whatever way civil societies may at first be formed, these reflections will shew us the necessity of them. Nothing, indeed, can place it in a stronger light, than this observation, that nature hath provided so many ways of entering into them; she has laid so many schemes for making us enter into them, that we must necessarily do it. Let us suppose a great body of men to be placed in whatever situation we please, they must necessarily, and finally, fall into societies. This takes place as certainly as any step, or effect, in a natural process, or operation.—And it is analogous to the operations of nature, in all her other great processes. We may observe, in general, that wherever she has a great end to accomplish, she provides always a superabundance of means; that, if one fail, another may take place, and her intentions may not finally be defeated. Wherever, then, on the other hand, we see a superabundance of means provided, we may conclude, with cer-

tainty, that there is some great and necessary end to be accomplished. The great end of society is to protect property, and prevent the miseries which would arise from the invasion of it. It fulfils the views of nature, by conveying industry safely to its object. It is in society alone that a species like ours can exist, because it is only there that their subsistence and preservation can be provided for. Theft, therefore, is inconsistent, not only with the design of society, but with the very existence of the species. It is a violation of the terms on which we live together, the only terms on which we can live, and leaves no alternative but one to choose upon, either to cut off the thief, or dissolve the society.

But, as it is better to prevent crimes than to correct them; as vice is deceitful, and as it is not in man to say how base he may be; I shall now, without insisting farther upon the nature of it, proceed to describe the causes from which this vice commonly proceeds, and to distinguish the steps by which men, if they once forsake God, and follow their own

evil desires, will very probably be led to the commission of it.

Let me begin, then, with observing what the experience of every age shews to be a fact, that there is often an original difference among minds themselves. Some minds seem to be naturally base, and ill-disposed. They discover, from the beginning, an unaccountable propensity to deeds of darkness, and of shame. They resemble those vile animals, who delight to live, and act in a gross element. They seem born for concealment, and are always immersed, in the strangest manner, and without the least appearance of necessity, in a mystery of dishonest practices. They possess a natural turn for shuffling, and a dexterity in deceit. It proceeds not from the want of education, nor of fair examples. They have often the best education, and the brightest examples set before them. But they are really base-minded, and seem originally to have been made of bad materials. You cannot, by any possible treatment, make them feel their meanness, nor inspire them with self-esteem. They have no proper sense, ei-

ther of praise, or of disgrace. They can neither be informed by precept, nor allured by good example. Their ideas seem to be inverted; and, though I will not say they value themselves upon a base conduct, yet they certainly delight in it. They will prefer, at any time, a gain which they can obtain by trick, to the same gain which they might obtain by fair dealing. They have no idea of ability in business beyond taking a catch, or an advantage. Their transactions are marked with quirk, lies, and dishonesty.—We may observe, in general, that every production of nature contains a mixture of refuse, which is either of no use, or of a very inferior one. These people seem to be the refuse of the human species. They are the dross, or chaff of our nature. They disgrace the mass to which they adhere, and have different habits from every body they are connected with. Miserable is the parent who observes this disposition in any of his children, and finds himself unable to correct it. Miserable is the child who has such a parent, and finds himself continually disgraced by him. But more miser-

able still is the unhappy being himself, unless he calls reflection to his assistance; for nothing but his own serious reflections can reform him.

But, in the second place, as there are some who are naturally base minded, and seem originally to have been made of bad materials, there are many more who were once virtuous, but are degenerated. We may affirm, indeed, that the greater number are of this sort,—men, who have set out in life with the fairest prospects, or at least with no worse prospects than others, and better prospects than many, have done well for a while, but, at last, by the most unhappy inattention to their own conduct, have been vitiated, and disgraced. The causes which prevail upon our principles, and bring men into this unhappy situation, may be reduced to the four following,—Poverty, Covetousness, Prodigality, and Idleness.

I. SOME are led to dishonesty, from the obscurity and false shame of Poverty. Their minds are humbled with their fortune, they cease to respect themselves, and begin to me-

ditate mean actions. They consider themselves as removed from notice, and become careless of their own conduct. Observing no respect paid them, they cease to wish for it, or to deserve it.—They are also under the impression of a false shame. They are ashamed to discover their situation, and to ask assistance and relief. There is a false shame, in most cases, as well as a deserved one. Poverty may be disgraceful, but it may also be blameless, and it may even be honourable. When it is brought upon a man by his vices, it is disgraceful; but it may arise also from accidents which he could not prevent;—from expences really necessary, from infirmity, or from misfortune. In this case, it is so far from being disgraceful, that it claims attention and regard. In one case, it is even honourable; when a man who has it in his power to amass riches by unjust, or mean methods, declines to do it, and prefers a virtuous poverty to a criminal, or disgraceful opulence. This is not only honourable, but is indeed sublime virtue. It combats the strongest temptations to which our nature can be exposed, and re-

quires the highest fortitude of mind, and elevation of sentiment, to resist, and to overcome them. This was the great character which distinguished the virtuous ages of the ancient republics; and it was not, indeed, until they lost this character, that they degenerated, and were destroyed. Nothing was then more common than to see illustrious men, who had passed through the highest offices, and performed the greatest actions, retire to an honourable poverty, and exhibit the same firmness of character, and contempt of folly, in a private station, as in the agitations of their public life. It is the uniform mark of vulgar and uninformed minds, that they form their opinion, both of others and themselves, from their external appearance and situation. There cannot be a sublimer character than the man who bears adversity nobly, and shews the world that his happiness and virtue depend not upon their sentiments, nor upon external fortune.—But in whatever way poverty may be occasioned, there is no reason why it should lead to vice. In extreme cases, we must ask assistance, and it is our duty to assist one ano-

ther. God forbid that we should place such a value upon the substance of this world, as to refuse a part to those who need it. The shame lies not in asking assistance, but in deserving to be reduced to that necessity. At any rate, we must not add one meanness to another; and, after contriving to be burdensome to our neighbours, contrive next to rob, and plunder them. The reasoning of the unjust steward, when he saw poverty approaching towards him, was, "What shall I do?" "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed." Therefore, he resolved, as bad or weak men often do, to be dishonest. He did not reflect, that to be a thief was more disgraceful than to ask an alms; and that dishonesty and breach of trust are the very last stage to which their own misconduct can lead the unfortunate.

II. ANOTHER cause which leads men to commit theft, is Covetousness.—There is a class of men who are remarkable for having a covetous disposition. They have an evil eye, and cannot look upon their neighbour's property without desiring it. It makes no difference

whether they have the same property of their own or not, nor indeed whether they be rich or poor. It is a malady to which they are subject, a disease of the dispositions. They cannot look from them, but they wish to steal.—With covetousness I may include Avarice, and consider them together. They are so nearly allied, that it is not necessary to treat them separately. The covetous man covets the property of others. The avaricious man cannot part with his own. He possesses that disposition which is known commonly by the name of *greed*. He cannot be brought to part with the least particle of his property. He gripes it to the last, and sets a ridiculous value upon it. He is an enemy to every scheme, without exception, which tends to take any thing from him.—There cannot be a stronger, or more just description given of this vice, than the apostle gives, when he says that it is idolatry. No vice is more unaccountable, or leads men to commit more outrageous and absurd actions. It has been observed by moral writers, that there is no vice, this excepted, but you may aggravate it by description

beyond the life; that is, you may draw such a picture of it as never was actually seen in the world. The character of the covetous man cannot be aggravated. You can conceive nothing so absurd, or monstrous, which an avaricious man has not, at one time or other, really perpetrated. The love of gain, when it takes full possession, can bear no rival in the heart. It puts every other principle, good and bad, to flight. The covetous man, from the moment he bows before it, acknowledgeth no superior power. It is the religion in which he is sincere, and the one, only god whom he worships without hypocrisy.—There is no vice which approaches so nearly to theft as covetousness. They are divided by a very thin element. The distinction is very simple between the man who strongly desires what is mine, and the man who takes it.—Covetousness arises generally from the abuse of that principle which we mentioned above, as necessary to preserve our species. Nature and reason both direct us to store up our superfluities, and reserve them for our future wants. In the summer and

harvest of our life, it is our duty, if we can, to make provision for the spring and winter of our age. But as human nature takes occasion from every thing to commit vice, we cannot wonder that the same thing should happen here. The desire of making a prudent provision for our necessities, is apt to degenerate into a thirst of gain, which grows upon us gradually, and becomes at last too strong for our sense of justice.—In the doctrine of causes and effects, it is a general rule that we value the means according to the ends they answer. We store up, or reserve our superfluities, because we conceive they will be of use to us. It is on this account we value them, and, if they could not answer this end, it would be absurd to keep them. Here, too, the folly of avarice displays itself. The covetous man inverts the order and the end of nature. Other men value money for the conveniences it procures. The covetous man values it for its own sake. He forgets the end, and conceives an absurd attachment to the means. It is not a providence of futurity, nor a simple natural inclination, but it

is a passion, a strong, restless, and raging passion, which obscures his reason, and consumes him.—A covetous man is generally thought mercenary. It is not so, for his passion is of the purest kind. There is really nothing of self in it. He may be said, in the most disinterested sense of the word love, to love money. It is not upon his own account that he regards it, but purely on account of itself. He loves it for its own sake, without regard to any emolument which it can procure for him. It produces, in fact, no emolument to him, but, on the contrary, much trouble and vexation. He pursues it with an ardent passion; and, without any farther views than to obtain itself, he subjects himself to every hardship and distress. His conduct is, in the strictest sense, romantic. He seeks riches, that he may live in want, and collects money, that he may not use it. But, alas! we cannot pay the same compliment to his reason. Though his passion is pure, his reason is subverted. In every sense of madness, he is a madman. He conceives an affection for what is not of the least value in itself; and

that he may obtain what he does not so much as propose, or mean to use, he will rob, steal, and murder; he will sacrifice his happiness, his character, and his life.

III. As some are led to commit theft from Covetousness, others are led to commit the same vice from Prodigality.—It is remarkable, that, in the natural world, extremes meet; and that, even in morals, they produce often the same effect. This is very particularly exemplified in the two vices we have now mentioned. They depart equally from nature, and lead, though by different roads, to the same crime. Nature directs us simply to store up our superfluities, and reserve them for our future wants. The covetous man stores up more than he ought; the prodigal stores up much less. The covetous man amasses every thing; the prodigal throws every thing away. The one goes beyond the intentions of nature; the other by no means fulfils them.—The prodigal is under the dominion of vile habits, and gross passions. He wants the common instincts of nature, and the

common providence of a man. He approaches nearer to the beast perhaps than any other character. It is the character of the prodigal, that he is entirely engrossed by the present moment, and by present sense. He obeys the precept literally, of taking no thought for to-morrow. He gorges the present, without reflecting on the future. He seems born to waste, and to consume. He never thinks on want, or suspects that matters are to be any otherwise than as they are. Eating, drinking, wasting, and devouring, dress, vanity, and company keeping, are serious objects with him. He consumes in one day what might support his family, or himself, for many days. At one time, he devours his substance in riot; at another time, he spreads it out in show. He parts with it for baubles, or disperses it for bad uses, or fairly swallows it. He has a native disposition to waste and scatter. It is not so much gratification, as it seems instinct, or fatality. You would think it was a study with him, (he is so very ingenious at it) to contrive methods of expence. He has so many ways of

dispersing, that he consumes his substance often he knows not how, and can give no account of it. He is surprised himself when he finds it gone; but becomes not, on that account, the wiser. His habits are now confirmed, and he is past the hope of being better.—Prodigals may be divided into two classes; the sensual prodigal, and the vain prodigal. The first is a beast, and the second a fool. The first indulges the gross appetites, and the second the frivolous. The first wallows in sensuality, the second glitters in shew, and foppery. The one consumes his substance by himself, the other expends it that the world may know he has it. They both agree in wasting, and are found, indeed, very commonly united in the same person.—It is easy to predict the effects of this character. If a man waste his substance, he must come to poverty. If he acquire habits, he must indulge them. If he consume in one day the provision of seven, he must think of some way to supply the expences of the other six. Sensual habits, besides, debase the mind, and render it mean and worthless. In this situa-

tion what is he to do? What is it which a man of his character most probably will do? It is painful to observe the decline of human nature, and the meanneſſes to which it can be reconciled. He muſt borrow, or he muſt ſteal. He muſt live upon his neighbour in one ſhape or another. Having diſpoſed of all his other moveables, he muſt bring his virtue to the market. If he reſerve it for his laſt ſtake, he pays it, indeed, a greater compliment than can be expected from him. He either cannot, or does not chooſe, to alter his habits, and ſtile of living. It makes no difference whether it be vanity or voluptuouſneſs. The effect is perfectly the ſame, whether he eat it, or purchaſe the opinion of fools with it. He muſt come neceſſarily upon the public; and it makes no difference in what way he gets poſſeſſion of their property,—whether he takes advantage of their ſimplicity, or ſteals it.

IV. The laſt cauſe of theft which I ſhall mention here, is Idleneſs. There is not a more ample ſource than this of vice, and

of disgrace. Not only our subsistence is provided, but our virtues are preserved, and kept alive, by habits of exertion and activity. Indolence, besides its immediate effect upon the circumstances, diminishes, and at last destroys, the powers of the mind itself. The virtues are impaired by want of exercise, and the very faculties of the mind, and indeed body, decay, and become torpid. This is succeeded naturally by an indifference to good or evil, or at least by such an attachment to ease and to indulgence, as absorbs all other considerations.—It is not often, however, that idleness is allowed to manifest itself in this gradual manner. The effects of it are often accelerated, and more immediate. Idleness, with respect to the bulk of mankind, produces want, and want must be supplied. But from whence is the supply to come? An indolent, idle man, cannot exert himself; or, if he can, he will not. He can submit to nothing that requires patience and application. He prefers death to labour, and embraces disgrace rather than perseverance. The application of a regular useful industry, is not suited to his ha-

bits ; and, if he be capable of any exertion, it is a sudden one, and must not be long continued.—That nature has intended us for action, is manifest from every consideration. Our health, virtue, and prosperity, depend upon it ; and, as soon as it is remitted, in any high degree, infirmity, disgrace, and misery, are the consequences.—Idleness may arise from two causes, a native disposition, and habits of indulgence and sensuality. Some are naturally of a slow, sluggish, and inactive disposition. They cannot easily be put in motion ; and, when they are, they move heavily, and are soon discouraged. They have a particular talent at doing nothing, and yet consuming time. They are remarkable for never finishing any thing ; and, though they waste the hours, and seem busy, it is impossible to say what they have been about. The least business fatigues them, and they are glad of any pretence to give it up. They are for ever putting off the hour of action, and inventing reasons of delay. There cannot be a more exact description of them, than is given by the wise man, when he saith, “ the sluggard

“ putteth his hand in his bosom, and cannot
“ bring it to his mouth again.”—These are
native sluggards; but there are men whose
idleness proceeds from habits of indulgence
and sensuality. These are still worse, and
more pernicious in society, than the former.
The first are useless, and are urged by want.
The last are completely vitiated. Sensual
habits corrupt the mind, and destroy the ac-
tive and noble qualities. They lead a man
insensibly to acquiesce in mean indulgencies,
and to sacrifice, for their sake, every consider-
ation and regard. This renders him at once
worthless, and disposed to adopt every disgrace-
ful expedient by which his vices may be sup-
plied. His good qualities are destroyed, and
bad ones implanted in their room. He has ac-
quired habits of expence from which he can-
not disengage himself, and of vice which he
cannot conquer. He is entangled in bad com-
pany, and soon finds himself engaged in bad
practices. He has neither resolution to re-
linquish the one, nor virtue to surmount the
other. His decline is therefore rapid, and his
destruction sudden, and inevitable.—Need I

confirm, by instances, what every man's own reason may suggest to him, that idleness and sensuality are the great nurseries of vice, and of disgrace? Ask the unhappy man who is doomed to perish by the justice of his country, what has led him to that disgraceful situation? He will tell you,—the dying words of almost every unhappy criminal will inform you,—that he was virtuously educated; but that, forgetting God, and his own honour, he suffered himself to be debauched by drunkards, and corrupted by bad women: that he then became dissipated and idle, the companion of thieves and murderers: until at last, having forsaken God, he was finally forsaken by Him; and led necessarily to the perpetration and fellowship of those disgraceful crimes for which he must now suffer.—Nor is it surprising, that habits of idleness and dissipation should produce such dreadful effects. Throughout all nature, we see the means adjusted, with the deepest wisdom, to the ends. Activity is essentially necessary to the preservation of our species. Our subsistence, in the helpless parts of our existence, depends entirely upon the

active exertions of our manhood, and of our youth. It is by our activity alone, while yet we can be active, that we can make that provision which is necessary for our final support and preservation. Reflecting upon this, we will not wonder that activity should be rewarded with the highest premiums, upon the one hand; and that idleness should be discouraged by the deepest penalties, and draw after it the most melancholy consequences, upon the other.

Thus I have endeavoured to treat the vice of Theft, with the chief causes which lead to it. It now only remains that I collect the conclusions which arise from the whole argument, and press them upon your attention. And this I shall do the more shortly, as they are so very obvious.

The first conclusion which presents itself, is the necessity of employing the active, and able part of our existence in acquiring that provision which is necessary to support the infirm, and disabled parts of it. This goes to the source of the disorder: "Go to the ant, "thou sluggard, consider her ways, and be

“wife.” We may take example from the inferior creatures, who are in the same situation with ourselves. Instinct itself directs them to make a provident provision for the time of want. They collect, in the summer, with frugal care, those stores which are necessary for their support in winter. So far as the present state is concerned, this is also our proper business, and the great end to which nature directs our labours. Every man, when he sets out in life, ought to ask himself this plain question, Whether he chuses to depend upon himself, or to come upon the public? He has but this alternative, and must at last do one of these two things. If he chuse the first, there is no covetousness, nor even any uncommon solicitude, necessary. He has only to exert himself, and be careful. But then he must do it while he can, and not think that his youth is to last for ever. The great error of youth, is want of foresight. Finding that all goes well at the present time, they conclude it must continue. They think they may provide for their necessities at any time, and squander away that substance which they

should reserve for their future wants, in gratifying their present fancies. They put off their prudence, as they do their repentance, from day to day; until they acquire habits which they cannot get out of, or are surprised by old age or misfortune.—But different is the voice of wisdom and experience. It speaks to the unreflecting, and calls upon the simple sons of youth: “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might.” Be advised, not to procrastinate, nor delay. Be active, that you may be honest; be sober, that you may not want. Do not defer, or put off, your sobriety and activity. Consider that, in a state like this, many events may happen which may disconcert your measures. You may meet with misfortunes, you may be unsuccessful, you may be disabled, and, at any rate, infirmity and old age are before you. Consider that a numerous and dear family may rise around you, and make demands upon you. If you would not know the fond pang of a parent’s heart, brooding over the wants of his children; if you would not invite temptation; if you would not embrace vice and disgrace; work, my brethren, work while it is to-day.

Begin early to do well. Depend upon yourselves, that you may not interfere with your neighbours. Cultivate sober, as well as active habits. Make provision for contingencies. Reflect how miserable it is to leave your old age unprovided,—to be thrown upon the mercy of a selfish world, which will upbraid you while it feeds you ; or, perhaps, at last, from shame or despair, betake yourselves to practices which must end in disgrace, and bring you, if they be persisted in, with horror and distraction, to your graves.

But, I think I hear some unreflecting person in this assembly, say, Why is all this addressed to *us* ? Why are we so earnestly warned against a crime which we despise, and can never possibly be guilty of ? Does the man think us thieves, when he cautions us against stealing ? Here I trace the pride and deceitfulness of the human heart,—false pride, which will soon be humbled, miserable deceitfulness, which will soon detect itself. I wish sincerely, that all the world were honest, and that there was no vice of any kind among us.—In answer to these people, let me be per-

mitted to remind them of the divine caution, "let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." There is a refuse attached to every society, and if our weak words could be instrumental in recovering, if it were but one wretched creature, from evil courses, or the suggestions of an evil heart, we might think that we had done some service.—But, even with respect to those who think themselves strong, and out of the reach of danger, let me exhort them not to be too secure. There can be no greater mark of frailty than self-sufficiency, nor are we ever weaker than when we think ourselves most strong. "Before honour is humility, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Our evil desires are still alive, and the devil is still busy. Yes, I will affirm to you, that if you make not provision for the time of want, want will overtake you. If you waste your own means, you must live upon other people. If you be covetous, if you be prodigals, if you be idle, if you give yourselves up to vice and bad company, you are advanced in the road of ruin. You are entangled in the net of iniquity. The snares of death are drawn

round you. These are the vices which lead to hell, and to the chambers of the grave. As your virtue and good name are dear to you, guard against them. Be convinced there is no crime, nor measure of disgrace, of which human nature is not capable. It needs only to be a little prepared, and made familiar with it. If you be wasters, idle, covetous, slaves to lust, drunkenness, and mean habits, there is nothing afterwards too disgraceful for you. What? Do you think that the unhappy creatures who perish every day in heaps by the hand of justice, were originally worse than others? Some of them were, but many of them also were virtuous, and thought as highly of themselves as you do. Like you, they would have taken it amiss to be instructed. They would have resented it highly, if any body had cautioned them against stealing. Yet they were corrupted, and fell. It should humble us forever to the dust to reflect, that not merely honest men, but men who possessed every advantage,—men of riches and substance, men of learning and piety, men celebrated for elo-

quence, and high in reputation, have been surpris'd by the deceitfulness of vice, and betrayed to ruin and disgrace. How ought it to alarm our fears, and put us upon our guard, when we observe that the most precious gifts of the mind may be infected; and that no measure of capacity, nor habits of profession, can secure us from the malignity of the passions, when they are fostered to a certain quality of virulence, and suffered to obtain dominion.

And here it will be of use to observe, and inculcate upon you, another conclusion which arises from this argument, and it is, that we ought to avoid, with the utmost circumspection, the causes which lead to this vice upon their own account. Independent of the disgraceful ruin to which they lead, they are themselves vices, and disgraceful. Covetousness, prodigality, idleness, and theft, belong all to the same family. They are all a monstrous perversion of nature, and the certain marks of a vitiated mind. The indulgence of any one of them will sink you beyond recovery. They are all degrading, and allied

closely with one another. Nothing, for instance, is more common, than to see a man throw away profusely with one hand; and, for that very reason, gripe, oppress, extort, and draw to him, from all sides, with the other. With one class of men he passes for liberal, while among another he is well known as an oppressor, and a sharper. I suppose here that he is able to preserve himself from theft; and consider him merely as entangled in the vices of his own character. I would state these vices to him, and intreat him, for their own sake, as well as on account of the end to which they lead, to guard against them.

With respect to those unhappy creatures, (for there is yet another class) who have already put forth their hand, and are entangled in evil practices;—those who waste with the one hand, and steal with the other;—it is with the utmost reluctance that we address ourselves to them. Yet we cannot properly close this discourse without directing a few words to them. It is better, indeed, that they be addressed from the pulpit than from the bench,—that their minister exhort them

than their judge. May God, then, my unhappy brethren! enlighten, and reclaim you. We can do little else than pity, and pray for you. You are, indeed, far advanced. In mercy to yourselves, if it be yet possible, be intreated to stop. What do you propose? Do you think you are concealed? Do you propose to confine yourselves to small frauds, and flatter yourselves, on that account, that no notice will be taken of you? Every criminal does the same. He begins with small things, and proceeds to greater. He cheats before he steals. He deals for some time in little catches, and advantages. The human mind cannot reconcile itself to disgrace at once. As little can it resolve at once to expose itself to the last danger. No man ever set out in life with an intention to be hanged. Hardly any man set out, from the beginning, with a deliberate resolution to be a thief. He discovers this disposition by degrees. He proceeds from one step, and passes from one delusion, to another. He keeps himself carefully, though with some difficulty, out of the reach of the law. He becomes gradually

hardened, and more secure. He still also hopes to escape, or to be concealed. These are delusions common to all vice. It proceeds from small beginnings, but to what horrid lengths does it arrive? Shudder to think what is before you. You now steal, you may soon murder. Be warned in time. Concealed you cannot be. Even human justice has many eyes, but divine justice certainly sees, and knows you. Escape you cannot. The eye both of God and man is upon you. The divine hand will find you. Be not deceived; neither covetous persons, nor idle, nor cheats, nor thieves, nor murderers, nor unclean, nor extortioners, nor profane, nor unjust dealers of any description, shall inherit the kingdom of God. These all belong to one mass, and will go together. They are the refuse of creation, and will be swept finally to perdition. Their place is called the bottomless pit, because they will never again rise into the creation. Nature throws them off as her disgrace and burden. She separates herself successively from evil. When the system is disordered, the malignity must be dis-

charged, otherwise it will corrupt, and overpower it. Religion measures vice by the disposition, and not merely by the overt act. Theft comprehends under it not only the act of stealing, but every species of injustice. What an unfathomable gulf is vice? How deceitful, and how dangerous? "O my people! come ye from the midst of her, and deliver every man his soul." Provide things honest, do justice, and separate yourselves from iniquity.

And here I cannot avoid repeating the observation which has so uniformly presented itself to us in these discourses, that the consideration of this vice, as of all the other vices, but of this vice more particularly, illustrates and confirms the general proposition which we have maintained,—That vice possesses a malignity of quality which is at present very imperfectly understood. What we have already remarked of the vice of theft, exposes sufficiently the general character of the evil quality; and shews, in a very forcible manner, the uniform, and determined law by which it acts; and that, from the most minute prin-

ciples, it leads invariably to the most disastrous, and alarming issues.—But, if more were necessary, there is more, much more, behind. There is yet a speculation (if it could answer any purpose to enter into it) which involves interests more general and important. The dispositions which lead to this vice, and the issues in which they terminate, are not confined to private life; but manifest themselves, in a manner yet more dreadfully conspicuous, in public communities.—War, with its attendant miseries, is the greatest calamity which takes place in our world. To those who indulge themselves in forming perfect schemes of government, it affords, no doubt, a grand problem how the governments of the earth may be so framed as to exclude this evil. For my own part, I am far from supposing that one form of government may not be better adapted for this purpose, as well as for other purposes, than another; but, as a teacher of religion, I am warranted to say, that I fear, in a speculation of this sort, the form of government will be found to embrace but the least part of this problem. Nations

are the great robbers. War arises obviously from the causes which we have now unfolded; and the same evil quality, which manifests itself among individuals and private families, produces concussions yet more general and dreadful, among states and kingdoms. Wars proceed from want and idleness, from covetousness and prodigality. A good government may certainly do much to correct these, and it is on this account that one form of government is preferable to another. But, can any thing shew the malignity of the evil quality more strongly, than that the operation of the best and wisest governments may be obstructed and baffled, not only by one bad government in their neighbourhood, but often by one evil disposition manifesting itself in a single individual of it? Supposing, not one government only, but all the governments of the earth, to be as perfect as the most benevolent mind can make them; yet one covetous, prodigal, needy, or idle minister, in any one of them, will light a volcano, and produce a concussion, which may sink them all in one horrible destruction.

Before, therefore, this evil can be obviated by governments, we must not only have perfect governments, but we must have a perfect set of men to administer them: in other words, the qualities of human nature must be rectified beyond the possibility of being vitiated, and every evil passion and disposition must be finally eradicated from our constitution.

Here, then, is the most important part of the problem,—how to eradicate all the evil passions of men. Before we can exclude war from the system, we must eradicate the seeds of covetousness and prodigality from the heart, and we must banish want and idleness, with all the evil dispositions to which they lead, from the world. What aggravates the difficulty, in the present case, is the different lights in which the same vices are viewed in private, and in public life; as it is well known that the same actions which conduct a thief or highwayman to the gallows, lead a successful minister or general to glory.

In this hopeful task, religion joins government; though, like most other grand allies, they do not seem always perfectly to under-

stand one another. The laws both of God and man have this for their object. They labour, uniformly and incessantly, to correct, and destroy the evil passions of our nature; but such is the malignity of the evil quality, that it continually surmounts them. They may palliate, (I hope they often do palliate) but they cannot cure. There is this to be said for our neglect of religion, that we treat the laws of heaven with no greater disrespect than we do our own laws; that is, we break both as often as we can with safety, whenever our evil disposition, or our mistaken interest, prompts us.

Here, then, after addressing individuals, I ought to address nations; after exhorting private persons not to be unjust, I ought to apply myself to statesmen.

But here also I feel a danger, and that an expostulation with people of this description is a matter of no small delicacy. The danger is, lest, while we mean only their moral improvement, they should think we are intermeddling with their politics. In the few words, therefore, which I am to say upon this

subject, I must claim the privilege, which is generally allowed in the world, that the present company are excepted. No, my good firs ! I say to all the politicians and statesmen of the present times, never suppose yourselves concerned. *Your* wars and treaties are all just and necessary. Stand, then, upon your privilege ; and do not, I beseech you, apply one word of what I am going to say, either to yourselves, or to any of your transactions.

To nations, then, whether monarchies or republics, and to the statesmen of nations, I would address the words of the apostle James.

“ From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they nothence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight, and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.”—The causes of war are here stated to be, covetousness and prodigality, idleness and want, the consequence of idleness; combined with irreligion, and the want of moral principle. In

other words, the same causes which lead individuals, conduct, by the same sure process, nations, to destruction;—with this very remarkable aggravation, that, in proportion to the mass which is set in motion, is the magnitude of the explosion. The vices of an individual operate in a small sphere; whereas the miseries which result from a nation, when it has received an impulse from any evil quality, even (which is very amazing) though the great bulk of the nation itself should be untainted by it, are dreadful and incalculable.

The question then, is, how to avoid these? It is certainly a very important problem. The directions, indeed, are plain, if it depended on directions.

My brethren, I say to all statesmen, I beseech you to bear with me, and to suffer the word of exhortation. I certainly mean you no evil. I know the difficulty of your situation, and the arduous duties (when you are really disposed to do your duty) which you have to perform. I am induced to address you, because much of the happiness or misery of the world depends upon you. I mean not

to weaken your hands ; but, by guarding you against vice, to strengthen them. I suppose, (and a curious enough supposition, as matters stand, it must be confessed it is) that you are reading this sermon. Hear, then, I intreat you, what you cannot be the worse for,—a few good advices.

First of all, fear God. Make *Him* not, I beseech you, your enemy ; for, after all, you are really nothing in his hands. Cultivate, (for the sake of enlarging your own minds, if for nothing else) the impressions of religion ; for however vast you may think your own schemes, religion opens prospects incomparably vaster. If she offer herself to you in the form of revelation, and if you either want leisure or talents to judge of its evidence, consider at least whether or not it may be made useful to good morals. Beware of the infamous distinction between private and public morality, or of acting upon the pernicious principle, that there is one rule for statesmen, and another for private persons. Be assured that vice is vice wherever it may appear, and that it produces invariably the same effects in

all situations. Reflect that you are not judges of it, and that the issues of it go beyond all your calculations. Beware of adorning villainous actions with fine names. The God with whom you have to reckon knows no disguises. He calls things by their plain names. He forms quite other estimates of human affairs than you do. Remember that what you call glory, he may call infamy; what you call conquest, he may call robbery; what you call bravery, he may call murder; and what you call liberty, or patriotism, he sees to be frequently nothing more than a pretence for a scramble, in the course of which you may gratify your own lust of power, or fill your pockets.

When you make war, be sure that you do it from a good principle; for, if you should not, it is a war of robbery, and you will certainly be made accountable for all the devastations and murders, which it may occasion. Remember that there is a dreadful responsibility attached to your situation. Wars of self-defence alone are justifiable. They are justifiable, because necessary; and they are neces-

sary, because they prevent evils of greater magnitude.—Make not war from covetousness. Look not, I beseech you, with an evil eye, upon the possessions of your neighbours. Suffer every nation to have a reasonable dividend, and do not take advantage of any temporary success to engross all to yourselves.—That you may not be covetous, be not prodigal. Waste not the public funds with which you are entrusted, that you may not be tempted, as is often the case, to look without you for the means of repairing your deficiencies. Remember that nations are the great robbers; and let no consideration induce you to do things for which a private person would be hanged. Be convinced that the earth is large enough for all the nations which inhabit it, and is able to afford full employment to you all without wars. If you wish (as every good statesman does) to increase the resources of your country, apply yourselves sedulously to cultivate her internal state. Contrive to give employment to the idle. So you will banish want. Multiply the means of living. So you will increase population. Let it be your

great object to make your people comfortable. So you will take the best chance to assure their loyalty, and to gain their love. Act *all* upon this system, so will statesman emulate statesman, and nation nation, in *well-doing*, and you will increase among you the general happiness of the world.—If you do these duties, you will find full employment for yourselves, without disturbing your neighbours. If you cultivate these principles, they will, in the first instance, enlarge your views, and fit you for statesmen ; and, in the next, they will abate much your value for the present world, and be your best guard against injustice. Acting upon a system of this sort, a statesman becomes a glorious character. He is then the patriarch of his nation. But when, instead of cultivating all the honest, fair means of living, within himself, he commences a war of injustice against his neighbours, he is then a real robber, and becomes a curse and an execration among his species.—It shews, in a strong light, the character of the vicious quality, that the evil disposition of one profligate, or short-sighted statesman, will, even unknown to him.

self, and sometimes even contrary to his own own intentions, often certainly to the intentions of his nation, actuate, if it be once admitted, the whole body of a people, and precipitate, in the most unaccountable and dreadful manner, the great masses of the nations upon one another.

It may still be asked, when a statesman of this character appears in one nation, what is to be done by the statesmen of other nations? An unnecessary question,—he must be resisted. And it is here that the evil quality of vice shews itself in its full magnitude; when we see the evil disposition, or act of one single person, involving, as it invariably does, millions of the innocent, together with the guilty, in one common, undistinguishing destruction.

Nothing is more true than “that God
“made man upright, but that he hath sought
“out many inventions.” Between the innocence and sweet simplicity of childhood, and the accumulated, the dreadful, the incalculable vitiations and crimes of advanced life, and of complicated societies, what an almost infinite difference?

The test which ought to be presented to every statesman, at his admission into office, and to which he should be required to subscribe his assent, is the tenth commandment;—
“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house,
“thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife,
“nor his man-servant, nor his maid-servant,
“nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that
“is thy neighbour’s.”

SERMON VI.

On the EVILS of SPEECH.

JAMES, iii. 2.

If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

THE language of moral writers, in the descriptions they give of man, is frequently more elevated than suits his state, or situation. They speak of the throne of conscience, of the court of reason, of the supremacy and subordination of his various powers. Equally lofty is the language of historians. We would conclude, from their narrations, that the most minute events of life proceed from deliberate views, and deep-laid schemes of policy. The sacred writers consider him in a more simple light. Divesting him of all that pomp

with which he clothes himself, they consider him simply as a being who has good and evil inclinations, and address him with plain precepts. Far from thinking that his conduct is always the result of system, they represent him as carried away frequently beyond his intentions; and regard the transactions of life as often the effect of accident, rather than of deep determination. Considering the subject in this light, they lay down such maxims, and give such advice, as are proper to guard him against accidental impressions, and give his conduct a settled direction. Of these, the maxim in the text is one example. It regards the government of the tongue, an article of the first rank in domestic life, where we are more apt than perhaps in any other case to be carried beyond our own purposes. We may judge of what importance the apostle thought it, from the manner in which he here speaks of it. "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

In discoursing from these words, I shall begin with making some observations upon the

subject in general: I shall then describe some of the more criminal abuses of speech, pointing out, as we go along, the causes they proceed from: and shall conclude, lastly, with urging the importance, and absolute necessity, of ruling the tongue, and preserving it under due direction.

The first general observation which occurs to us upon this subject, is the difficulty of ruling the tongue. This circumstance has not escaped the Apostle James: "The tongue," says he, "is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." This Apostle seems to have been more struck with the offences of the tongue, and to have paid more attention to them, than any other sacred writer. He contemplates, with amazement, the mighty effects which so small a member is capable of producing; and considers a great proportion of the evils of life as arising from the improper use of it. Hence he recommends, in warm terms, the government of the tongue; and affirms, that, without this, there can even be no religion. "If any man among you," says he, "seemeth to be religious, and brid-

“leth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own
“heart, this man’s religion is vain.” With
respect to the difficulty of governing it, he
says, that every thing, besides itself, even the
fiercest natives of the earth and seas, have
been subjected. “For every kind of beasts,
“and of birds, and of serpents, and things in
“the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed, of
“mankind. But the tongue can no man
“tame. It is a fire, a world of iniquity.
“It defileth the whole body, and setteth on
“fire the course of nature, and it is set on
“fire of hell. Therewith bless we God, e-
“ven the Father, and therewith curse we
“men, who are made after the similitude of
“God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth
“blessing and cursing.” This he considers
as the amazing circumstance, and as similar to
nothing in the natural world. “Doth a foun-
“tain,” says he, “send forth at the same
“time sweet water and bitter? Can the fig-
“tree bear olive berries? either a vine figs?
“So can no fountain yield both salt water
“and fresh.”—This effect, however, as well
as the difficulty of restraining it, proceeds from

the nature of our ideas, and the mixed character of man. New objects are continually producing new thoughts; and the more numerous these become, there is the greater danger of their bursting forth. A vessel, if you pour water continually into it, will overflow. When a man looks into his own mind, the mass of thoughts of all kinds which he meets with there, will amaze him. Were the wisest man alive to bring his whole thoughts abroad, and spread them, as they arise, before the world, he would be completely ridiculous. All men's ideas are much alike, and wisdom consists more in the degree of power which a man has to restrain his thoughts, and bring only such forth as are proper, than in the thoughts themselves.—What renders it still more difficult to oppose this mass, are the passions by which it is often agitated. These press upon it with violence, and force for themselves a passage. They are like a storm which descends upon the ocean, and moves the waves in heaps towards one place. Temptations, too, add their pressure, unguarded moments offer, and men are almost always em-

ployed, from various motives, to remove your defence, and to draw your thoughts from you. From all these circumstances, the difficulty of restraining our speech will appear. It is so far from being surprising that we speak so much, that it is amazing how we speak so little. It is so far from being strange that we do so much harm with our tongues, that it is a wonder we do not more.—Difficult, however, as the government of speech is, we must observe, that it is not impracticable. If a man cannot restrain it completely, he has it in his power at least to moderate it. We not only see individuals, but we are acquainted even with whole nations, who have attained a very great command of this faculty. Attention will overcome great difficulties, nor have we reason to think there is any precept enjoined to us, which is, in its effect, impracticable.

The second general observation, which offers itself to us upon the government of speech, is the simplicity of it, considered as a method of governing the passions. It is in this view chiefly that the Apostle James recommends it

to our attention. Though he is fully sensible of the difficulty of such government, yet he mentions, with admiration, the extensive effects, and beautiful simplicity of it, when it is attained. He considers the tongue, though a small member in itself, as the swayer of the whole body; and that, whoever can command it, hath attained the secret of commanding the whole man: "If any man," says he, "offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses mouths, that they may obey us, and we turn about their whole body. Behold, also, the ships, which, though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth."—We may observe, that, in the most complex machines, there is always one part of them which commands the rest; and that a small degree of power, applied there, will stop their most multiplex operations. It seems, in the present case, to be exactly so with man. When you restrain the tongue, you stop the passions at

their commanding point. You do not merely drive them back into their repositories, but you destroy their motion and their force. They acquire strength from motion, and the way to keep them quiet, is to restrain them at the issue. This is done easily, if you apply your care at the mouth, and suppress the first expression of them. Prevent the movement of the passions, and you prevent their violence. — To explain this farther, we may observe, that the passions and the speech act mutually upon another. As the management of the passions has an effect on the tongue, so the management of the tongue has as certain an effect on the passions. As the indulging of the passions provokes the tongue, so the indulging of the tongue, in its turn, inflames the passions. How often do we see men talk themselves into a passion? Sufficiently moderate, at first, they become at last outrageous. Some slight omission, which hardly claimed notice, they magnify, at last, by the mere force of talking, into a gross injury. Their passions and imagination thus inflamed, they rage without end themselves, and awaken, finally, the wrath of

others. In like manner, the indulging of the tongue has not a surer effect to inflame the passions, than the restraining of it has to moderate them. Let a man be ever so high in wrath, if he can but restrain his tongue, he will gradually become cool, and deliberate. In short, the management of the passions by the speech, contains a beauty, and simplicity, which render it at once practicable and pleasing.

Having premised these general observations upon the management of speech, I come now, in the second place, to consider particularly the abuses of it in society, and the importance of obtaining some share, at least, of due government over it.

To this part of the subject let me proceed by observing, first, in general, that much talking of any kind is but a bad practice. In the multitude of words, saith Solomon, there wanteth not sin; and again, he that hath knowledge spareth his words. Much talking is of no use in business, and impedes, indeed, for the most part, rather than advances it.

—Many are the disadvantages which attend this infirmity. It is a sure waste of time, in the first place, and is apt to lead a man into a habit of trifling, in the next. Few affairs of life are so intricate but they may be explained shortly; and, if a man means not to deceive, he can deliver his mind, upon most occasions, in very few words.—But the greatest disadvantage of all is, that much speaking is an enemy to much thinking. The man who talks perpetually, has not leisure for thought, and must acquire a habit unavoidably of delivering opinions which he has not reflected on. Little credit, therefore, is due to his judgment, and his account in society will be but small. He is also constantly in danger of discovering what he should conceal; and of prejudicing, by this means, both his own affairs, and those of other men.—Let me mention, in general, what we may all observe, how extremely difficult it is for a man to talk much, and, at the same time, suffer nothing that is improper, at any time, to escape him,—nothing that hurts others, or that hurts himself. How many occasions of offence,

how many breaches among friends, how many fatal enmities, have arisen from this cause? —The system of education adopted by the Persians was simple, but extremely rational. They taught their youth two things,—to be secret, and to tell the truth. This was well adapted to inspire both the confidence, and the respect of men. A perpetual talker is respectable in no light. He is a dangerous friend, a tedious companion, and a fatiguing man of business.—The opinion of the world, indeed, with respect to this habit, has been long formed. They have always attached the ideas of wisdom and of respect to silence, and to a grave deportment. Though they are often mistaken in this judgment, (for the one does not necessarily imply the other) yet the principle from which they judge is always proper; —that people who speak sparingly have a chance of being oftener right than people who speak for ever; because they take at least time to reflect before they give their opinion.—Another unfortunate circumstance too, is, that when a man has once given his opinion, he is induced frequently, from pride,

to persevere in it, even after he is convinced that he is wrong.—All this shews the folly of a hasty talker; and will convince us, that the wise man was right when he observed, that in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin, and that even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is accounted wise.

In the second place, let me observe that the evils of speech, upon a general view of them, may be considered as arising from two sources, design and accident, and frequently also from a mixture of both. People are sometimes led to abuse their speech without any formed design. They are betrayed into it by taking the rein from their mouth, and allowing their tongues to wander without keeping any certain end in their view. At other times, when they do design evil, they suffer themselves to be carried much farther than they intended. This is, indeed, so generally the case, that we are warranted to conclude there is a greater mixture of accident in the evils of speech than there is perhaps in any other vice. Though this, therefore, would be a good division for us to use, yet as we

cannot always preserve the abuses of speech which arise from the one of these distinct from those which arise from the other, we think it better to describe the abuses themselves;—including, as we go along, the causes from which they may arise, in the description. With this view, therefore, I shall now mention, as shortly as possible, the most remarkable classes of vain talkers with which life is pestered, and society so often set on fire. These I divide into three,—your abusive talkers, your evil speakers, and, lastly, your plain liars.

I. The first class whom I shall mention, are your *abusive talkers*. I mean by these, your loud outrageous people; who are perpetually quarrelling with their neighbours, and are noted in society for living amidst noise and scolding. These are the violent and the outspoken; who give themselves credit for saying abusive things, and who seem to observe no rule but to keep their voices going. These people value themselves upon nothing so much as upon putting a sober person out of countenance; and they recount their victories of this sort with as much pleasure as if they had per-

formed some memorable achievements. The great secret of their profession, next to a numerous string of bad words, (which they have always ready, and which one would wonder how they picked up) is to learn every body's private history; and, if there be any foolish circumstance in it, (as there must be more or less in all men's) to remember that well, and dash it out upon him unexpectedly, and, if possible, when he would wish to appear to some advantage. This generally completes his rout, and puts him into a confusion which he cannot rally. Another requisite in their trade is, that, as it is their professed purpose to put others to shame, they must not be subject to this feeling themselves. By this means, as they are daily labouring to hurt the feelings of others, and to destroy their own, they become at last completely shameless. They care not what they say, nor what is said to them. With them, all modesty, and all respect, are at an end. They have lost the decent part of their nature, and live constantly amidst noise and outrage.—Yet it is, in some respects, a pity of this sort of people; for not-

withstanding this unlucky turn, there are many of them obliging, and kind hearted. They are not noted for keeping up resentment. What they say does not necessarily proceed from malice, and they will be friends with you next day, if you desire it. But they have the misfortune to be born with violent passions; and, as they have never been taught to restrain them, they have at last lost all self-command, and are under the necessity of giving vent to them. If they should die for it, they must have their minds out; till at last they acquire a settled stile of language, and an invincible habit, even when there is no passion, of speaking out upon all occasions.— I would wish these people, if they are not past reflection, to pause a little in the midst of their victories, and to consider their situation. While they think they make other people ridiculous, (and they certainly sometimes do it) they never fail to make themselves so. Let them only consider the light in which they appear to the rest of the society. How often are they told that their tongue is no scandal, and that nothing they can say is held in the least

account. This is the more to be regretted, as with a little attention it might be much otherwise. If they could but rule their tongue, if they could but restrain themselves so far as not to offend in word, they might be a respectable class of citizens. In place of every body's smiling at them, they would find themselves consulted and caressed. They should lay down a firm resolution to regard their tongue as their greatest enemy. As they do not know where it is to stop, they should avoid carefully all occasions of putting it in motion. "Contention," says the wise man, "is like the letting out of water." It would be of use if they would resolve firmly, when a temptation offers, upon no account to speak; but to retire and compose themselves, and not to appear again till they have thought seriously, and recollected themselves. If they would follow this advice for any time, they would assuredly find the good consequences of it. —For I would only ask them, what they have made by all this railing, this scolding, this shameless trade of name-calling, in which their lives have been employed? Has it advanced

their interest in any respect, or has it made them people of more consequence? Have they ever, in any one point, found it of advantage? If they can reflect, I suppose they will see that it has had effects quite contrary. —It is an old and good maxim, that little said is soon mended; and, indeed, there are few reflecting men but would wish, on most occasions, that they had said less than they did say. But railing is disgraceful, and places human nature in the lowest state it can appear in. The tongue, in such a situation, is justly said to be “a fire, a world of iniquity, to defile the whole body, and to be itself set on fire of hell.”—But what must the situation of those be who are obliged to live with such people; especially if these disagreeable passions have settled, as they frequently do, into habits of ill nature? What is amusement to the rest of the world is none to them. They cannot take as much of it as they choose; they are obliged to return to it; and, if their peace is not destroyed, they are at least teased, and disconcerted by a way of life which they see no end of. What adds to this, is, that they

are perhaps interested in the offender, and then they are doubly mortified.—Speaking of scenes of domestic chagrin which flow from this cause, Solomon says, “ it is better to live “ in a corner of the house-top, than with a “ brawling woman in a wide house ;” and, that “ better is a dinner of herbs where love “ is, than a stalled ox, and hatred therewith.” In another place, he says, “ that a contentious woman is like a continual dropping “ in a very rainy day.” He takes women chiefly for his examples, when he speaks of this vice ; not, I suppose, because they are naturally more addicted to it than men ; but because, as they move chiefly in a domestic sphere, and are sometimes less occupied with active business, they have it more in their power to be troublesome in this respect : and to shew us, secondly, that even *their* agreeable qualities do not compensate for this one defect, if it be not corrected.

II. THE second class of talkers, or of people who offend in word, are your *evil speakers*. These are your people who are noted in so-

ciety for a most unhappy habit of detracting from the merit, or of censuring the actions, and the lives, of others.—They differ materially from the former class, and they differ for the worse. What the former say proceeds from passion, and is delivered openly. Their object is merely to abash you at the instant, without any deliberate intent of doing hurt. But an evil speaker continues his practice, even without the excuse of passion, and does it with this aggravation, that he generally makes his attacks in absence, and when people have no opportunity of defending themselves. His object is to ruin character, or, at least, to lessen it in the esteem of mankind. This object he pursues in the most deliberate manner, and with the most unwearied perseverance.—Much pains have been taken with this class of people in all ages, for they are, indeed, a very capital nuisance in society. I cannot say, however, that the effect has corresponded, or that their number has been diminished. Reproof seems to serve no purpose with respect to them, but to make them conduct their business with more address, and,

consequently, to make them more dangerous. — Evil speakers do not all act from the same motive, nor carry on trade in the same manner. It is amusing to observe the variety which prevails among them. Some are evil speakers naturally. They seem to have a real, native disposition to set every thing in a bad light. If there be two ways, a good and a bad, of accounting for any action, they were never yet heard to take the good one. They speak evil incessantly, and in cases where it is impossible they can have any end to serve, except the gratifying of pure inclination. These people never saw a right action, nor an unexceptionable character. They are great observers, and great historians. But their misfortune is, that they never observe a right thing, and that their histories are all of one complexion. Their memories are so many store-houses of circumstances to the disadvantage of people; and it is really amazing what a collection of this sort they have amassed together. It seems to be the leading principle of their philosophy, that every good action proceeds from accident, and every bad one

from design. This is, indeed, very unfortunate. There are certainly right things done, if they were not out of the way, and there are also tolerable good characters to be met with. Where they live, or how they pass their time, that they never meet with any thing of this sort, is very surprising. At any rate, their dispositions (I mean here with respect to themselves) are very unlucky, and they should beware of indulging them. I do not mean that it will make them unhappy; for, instead of being vexed at such scenes, one would think that the more vice and folly they saw they were the better pleased. But the indulging of such dispositions is improper, because they tend certainly to impiety, and to place the Supreme Being, as well as his works, in a bad light. It must also corrupt their own minds, by storing them with a mass of vicious anecdotes and observations. A person really well disposed would not carry such a load about with him, and much less be at the trouble of retailing it. Such is the first sort of evil speakers. I shall consider the rest more cursorily.—A second sort speak evil of people

from resentment. They think they have received an injury, and this is the method which they take of revenging it. Let me hint to these people, that this is a mean method, and a mean revenge. There is no reason, because a man has done one wrong thing, that I should do another; because he has injured me, that I should injure myself; because he has been impertinent, that I should turn a tale-bearer. A noble silence is much more judicious; or, rather, we should show how different our own dispositions are from his, by taking every opportunity of doing him justice.—A third sort speak evil from vanity. They cannot bear to see any body preferred to themselves. They hear the praises of others with manifest uneasiness. They seem to think that every addition to another man is so much taken from them; and that every degree of applause, which they hear bestowed upon him, implies a censure upon their own conduct. This foible prevails chiefly among men of the same profession, or men who are engaged in the same pursuit. These people, too, disappoint themselves. The only way of raising them-

selves above others, is really to excel them. The world is not so stupid as to take a man's word in his own cause. They will rather, if they see him too fond of applause, take a pleasure in withholding it. Where praise is the only thing concerned, they are pretty impartial; and only begin to be unjust when you begin to ask any thing from them. In this case, it is goods for value, and merit is without the question. A man may, on such an occasion, renew the old complaint, that interest is preferred to desert; but, while he is sensible of this, and is even lamenting it, he has certainly no room for envy.—A fourth class are evil speakers from party. They allow no merit without their own circle, and speak evil of you for no reason but because you belong not to their club. These people, if they speak as they think, are very narrow-minded; and, if they do not, are hypocrites.—A fifth sort of men speak evil of others, for the sake of telling a story. Without either envy or malice, they think it incumbent on them to contribute something to conversation. It might cure these people to

reflect, that they are not always expected to speak; that a person's merit does not ly in talking; that none but superficial people will judge of a man from what he says; that society would frequently be obliged to him to hold his tongue; and that, at any rate, silence is preferable to slander.—A sixth sort propagate evil stories, because they heard such a man say so, and that they may have an opportunity of telling you that they were in such a company. This weakness might be cured by reflecting, that the world will be disposed to believe that they are in good company but seldom, otherwise they would not think it such a favour.—A seventh sort help forward the business, from a communicative disposition. They have no bad intentions, but they want the retentive faculty. The dam is weak, and their thoughts issue. They do not believe the story themselves, but they are apt to tell it to people who will believe it. It is not easy to cure this frailty, but for that reason it should be the more seriously attempted.—The circumstance of the marvellous, too, has a great effect. Nothing tends more to make

a story spread, and to set the tongues of people a-going, than its being uncommon, or happening at a distance. Such people should reflect, that the more uncommon a story is, it is the more improbable; and that few things are done in one country which do not happen in another.—Lastly, There is a sort of people, (and they are a very numerous class) who speak well or ill of you, just as they happen to be on good or bad terms with you at the time. Their opinion is perpetually shifting, and you cannot reckon, for any time, either upon their good or bad word. We may call these occasional evil speakers. They are like intermitting springs, which flow, and cease to flow, alternately, and according to the influences they are under.—Let me add a word upon the practice of gossiping.—Gossiping is a sort of social infirmity. It arises from a passion for news, and a strong desire of knowing what our neighbours are doing. People possessed with this passion, fall naturally into a club, where they speak evil in company, and form themselves insensibly into a dead jury upon characters.—Gossiping people are

not necessarily malevolent, though they have every chance to become the dupes of the malevolent. They feel a craving, and they meet simply to receive a gratification.—This infirmity is found chiefly among people whose minds are unfurnished, and who have not sufficient business to employ them. The proper cure for it, if they wish to cure it, is to find something else to do.—Let me just observe farther, that the people most addicted to evil speaking are commonly people whose own characters have been touched, and who wish to bring every body to their own level.—There would be no end of enumerating all the different sorts of them. As little would it be possible to mention all the different methods which people take to hurt one another. One of the most common, and most detestable, is when it is done under the appearance of friendship.—All these different kinds of evil speakers are extremely dangerous, and a very capital nuisance in society.

III. THE last class of talkers whom I shall mention here, and who abuse the faculty of

speech more than all the rest, are your plain liars. This is a most amazing set of people. They have acquired a habit which is most pernicious to society, and to their own minds. It misleads others, and destroys their own principles. It is not only pernicious, but contemptible. The man who is under its power, must render himself a most despised being.—There are various kinds of liars, some who lie from interest, some from envy, some from malice, some from vanity, some from resentment, and some from fear. But your finished liars are different from all these. It is their peculiar mark that they tell lies, not only without having any interest, but without having any possible view of any kind, which they mean to serve. You can discover no possible motive for their stories, except the mere inclination of telling stories.—It is difficult to describe all the steps by which men arrive at this last stage. They begin in the years of childhood, and proceed gradually. Abstracting from interest, from envy, from malice, or resentment, (principles which make many people lie occasionally, who are

not habitual liars) we shall mention two passions which may be called constant causes of lying,—fear and vanity. With respect to the first, children, when they are afraid to own the truth, begin to tell lies; and the same principle, if they suffer it to predominate, makes them shuffle, and equivocate, and lie, all their lives after. It is this circumstance which renders the character of a liar so contemptible. The very naming of a man to this, fixes such a stain, among people of honour, that nothing but blood has been thought sufficient to efface it. Calling a man a liar is telling him, in other words, that he is so mean of soul, as to lie through fear; that he has not courage to tell the truth; that he has not so much fortitude of mind, as is necessary to make him an honest man.—This practice is best prevented by proper attention in the years of youth. Youth should be taught uniformly to be more afraid of telling a lie than of any thing else. Parents, and people who have the charge of education, have much to answer for, if they do not attend to this. There are some children of very good dispo-

fitions, but of a timorous nature. Wherever this appears, the greatest care should be taken not to frighten them, and make them tell falsehoods, (which many children do) to save themselves from reproof. Many a promising, good character has been ruined by not attending to this.—The second sort of liars whom I mention, are those who lie from vanity. This, too, begins early, and requires an early remedy. It seems to proceed at first from quickness of fancy, which being indulged in the years of youth, and not checked properly by parents, and those who have the charge of education, becomes at last too powerful to be subdued. What is most lamentable, the quicker the parts of the subject are, it is in the more danger; because it is encouraged by the mistaken applause of the people about it.—Thus, too much severity with some, and too much indulgence to others, do equal hurt. In the one case, they are frightened, and, in the other, they are flattered, into the telling of falsehoods. It is as great an error to bear hard upon modest children, as it is to encourage forward ones.—Parents, however, are

much more apt to fall into the last extreme, than the first. Every parent thinks his own child a wonder, and is but too apt to let him see that he thinks so. Every word he speaks, every thing he does, is admired. Observe well the consequence. Observe what a fund of folly is thus unwarily laid in for the unhappy infant. The seeds of vanity which are now sown will grow ripe apace, and produce a full harvest. What a pity it is of a young person, who possesses this turn of mind, and comes into the world without a friend to advise, and let him know what people say of him? He talks away, and thinks himself in the high road to fame; while he is preparing himself fast for the most utter contempt into which a human being can fall. He is first generally remarkable for being a great teller of stories, of which he is usually himself the subject. He tells you what he said in such a company, what he did at such a place, and what was said, and done to him, by such and such people. A man cannot tell a story, however surprising, but he has one to match it; which he saw, or heard himself,

or in which he was actually engaged. It is still himself he speaks of, it was himself who saw, it was himself who heard, it was himself on whom the whole affair turned. Take his word for it, he has been a very busy man, and a man of much import. You would think the whole affairs of other men had stood still, till he had got his part performed. You would imagine he had done as much business as any six men, and wonder how he found time for all the scenes in which he has been engaged. If he has been any time in another country, it is a most unhappy temptation to him. He thinks he may then tell what he pleases, without the hazard of detection. In this manner, then, he proceeds; his invention is inexhaustible; his stories become more and more wonderful; every time he repeats them he adds some new circumstance; till at last he loses all credit, and his hearers lose all gravity.—At length, vanity, and every other passion apart, he arrives at the last stage, and tells lies which you cannot see the end of.—Of all the dealers in this commodity, your malicious liars are the worst. A

man who lies from vanity, and to make the world believe that he is some great personage, is an object of ridicule. A person who lies from fear, is an object of pity. But a man who lies from malice, and with a deliberate design of doing hurt, is an object of detestation. He resembles his father the devil, who is described as a liar from the beginning, and as depraving his own character, for the mere satisfaction of hurting others. Such men, as they have forfeited all confidence, and all respect, ought to be expelled from society; and driven to herd together, where they may employ themselves in the least injurious way in which they can be employed, in telling falsehoods upon one another.

I have thus finished the observations which I had to offer upon the government of speech, and shall now just look back upon the subject, and state a few of the general conclusions which arise from it.—The field through which we have passed affords another instance, and a very wonderful one, of the malignity of vice. It shews, that not only the intentional expression, but even the accidental ebuk-

litions; of this quality go beyond our ideas;— that they lead to consequences over which we have no power, and which are absolutely removed from our apprehension.

Upon considering this subject, then, at large, the first general reflection which presents itself to us, are the extensive evils, as well as the extensive advantages, of speech itself. Next to the powers of reason, we may pronounce this to be the noblest faculty of man. It is by the means of this faculty that societies are formed, and that the great intercourse of human life is maintained. Words duly chosen, and fitly spoken, are compared to jewels, richly set, and properly displayed, which dazzle, and at the same time delight observers. The reason of man never appears to more advantage, than when it approaches us in the charms of language, and arrayed with all the beauties of a chosen and just expression. How agreeable is the man of soft words, who moderates his passions, and behaves, on all occasions, with civilized manners? How graceful, how commanding is the speaker, who addresses us with informa-

tion, and fixes our attention with the justness, and the extent of his observations? It is the feast of reason, the food of the mind, which enlarges, at the same time that it delights, our powers. Whether it is applied to business, to conversation, or to public policy, its effects are still distinguished.—But extensive as are the benefits of speech, we have seen, on the other hand, that it is capable of producing as extensive mischiefs. It can sow the seeds of discord, and scatter them wide around. It can set man against man, and destroy the peace of families, and of neighbourhoods. Instead of love and harmony, it can awaken the passions of the fiends, and make earth resemble the mouth of hell, which sends forth nothing but rage, execrations, and despair. So extensive are its effects, that it is said itself to be a world of iniquity ; and, being lighted by fire of hell, to communicate infernal flames, and to set on fire the course of nature.—Since, then, it can do so much good, or so much evil, does it not become us, Christians, to pay the highest attention to this faculty, and be at the greatest pains to bring it under due

subjection? Yet, my friends, how seldom is this done? How many of us give due attention to our words, and the consequences which flow from them? Even there where peace might dwell, and common ties unite, how often do we hear angry, unguarded words, awaken wrath and contention? Do not our streets sound too frequently with the brawls of neighbours, and discord of private families? Are not our ears stunned with horrid oaths, with obscene speeches, and drunken uproar? Would not one think, when the desperate passions raise their voices, that the fiends of hell were abroad, and that earth meant to bid heaven defiance? Is there not also a set of active people who go through society, and make it, one would think, a business, by the most malicious methods, to inflame the minds of men against one another. Lies, slander, brawls, and malice, are scattered with a large hand. — My brethren! these things ought not to be. They are shameful, and unbecoming any decent character. How, then, prevent them? Stop your words. In this short sentence lies the remedy. It is this

which the Apostle calls the bridle of the body. Like unruly steeds, we are commanded by the mouth, and the fierceness of our passions managed. Or, like ships tossed by the storms, this is the small helm, which sways our motions, and directs us to the calm harbour. He uses these metaphors with great propriety. They denote at once the violence of our passions, and by what a simple method notwithstanding they may be checked.—Let me repeat, what we have before observed, that the management of the passions has not a more certain effect upon the tongue, than the management of the tongue has upon the passions. Let a man be ever so high in wrath, if he can but restrain his tongue, he will find his passions fall, and will gradually become cool and deliberate. Do you doubt? Try the experiment. Comply with us, Christians, but so far. If it succeed, try it a second time,—try it a third,—do it always. The least effect which it will have, will be to compose your manners, and to make you decent. Now, this is surely of use, even in cases of real injury. For supposing that a man really

receives an injury, how is he to obtain redress? Is it by talking? Or by wrath? Will these do him good in any light? They may make himself unhappy, and give his enemy a triumph. But they will not repair the injury, nor put him in the way of obtaining justice. On the contrary, they usually impede this by disconcerting him.—And it is wisely ordered that it should be so. It is wisely ordained by nature, that all violent passions disappoint themselves, and hurt their own purpose. This discourages the exercise of such passions, and moderates, in some degree, their effects. It is the same case with evil-speaking, and with common lying. While they do mischief in the community, they recoil with certainty upon the unhappy subject himself who practises them. They destroy him within, and give a character to his mind and conduct which is indelible. What an object of contempt is a common liar? And how detestable is the man who sets neighbours and friends at variance? He is stiled in scripture a talebearer, and a firebrand, who scattereth wounds, arrows, and death.—The

word scattereth, applied to an evil-speaker, is very happily descriptive. It is an amazing circumstance, and particularly applicable to this vice, that even when the fallacy is detected, the effects do not cease; and that the punishment of it, however certain, gives no adequate compensation, nor affords any sufficient security, against the mischiefs which arise from it. Even when we despise the liar, the lie makes an impression, and creates a prejudice which remains with us. The poison which is scattered lies not dormant; some part of the aspersions adheres; and the very naming of a man to a mean action creates a connection which brings him always to view when it is mentioned. So subtle is the virulence, so fatal the taint of vice! Put it once in motion, it works blindly on all sides.—This effect becomes more particularly important in an improved state of society, when conversation begins to be cultivated for its own sake, and when much of our enjoyment arises from it. The ambition of men is then turned into that channel, and the universal object is to say, not what is proper, but

what we think will please. By this means, men insensibly depart from the manly character; and, under other names, are in danger of becoming liars, and tale-bearers.—The scripture, adverting to evil speaking, particularly denotes tale-bearing; and, in describing the tale-bearer, it is remarkable that it does not expressly impute design to him. It describes the character, whether acting from design or not, as unsafe, and pestilent. In this view, it exhorts us to avoid him, and to treat him with no confidence. The tale-bearer collects fugitive conversation, and scatters it among the society. The scripture calls him a firebrand. It is like scattering the seeds of fire among combustibles, and giving motion and life to what might otherwise fall away, and be extinguished. Avoid, then, the tale-bearer. Guard against the man of conversation. He is a fool, or mischievous. No man is always on his guard; and the most cautious may, in a hasty moment, utter a rash expression. But let it not be repeated, and it will die directly, and be forgotten as it ought to be. A man's sentiments must not be judged

by this ; but by the usual temper of his mind, and prevailing tenor of his whole conduct. In a moment of anger, nothing is more common than to hear a man utter things which are quite different from his real sentiments.—Here we still trace the peculiar character of the vicious quality. It produces uniformly, from the simplest beginnings, even from beginnings which seem indifferent, and where no design appears, the most extensive and alarming consequences. The most minute seed of it contains the virulence, and spreads throughout the mass it falls upon. Even speech itself, which one would think light as air, and as unsubstantial, whether it be intended or accidental, follows the rule, and confirms the general principle. The very explosions of it are not indifferent, nor can be safely disregarded.—Nay, we may go farther, and affirm, what is well known to every man who knows the world, and has lived in it, that not only the matter of our speech, but the very manner in which we deliver ourselves, conveys the virulence, and produces the most serious and fatal consequences. Vice resembles that

matter to which it has been thought to adhere; and may be divided and sub-divided *in infinitum*, without abating its virulence, or losing its distinctive quality.—Having said so much of evil speakers, we may give this caution to the people upon whom they practise. “Also,” says the wise man,” take no heed “unto all words that are spoken, lest thou hear “thy servant curse thee. For oftentimes also “thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself “likewise hast cursed others.”—If the quality of vice be so subtle, we ought to be the more upon our guard against it. We should be careful at least to distinguish accident from design, the ebullitions of the moment from the settled habits of the man. By this means, if we cannot entirely repel vice, we will at least often retard it in its approaches to us. To silence the fiend, it is necessary to give him a soporific; and we preserve our own peace most effectually, when we preserve and cultivate the general peace of the society.

SERMON VII.

On the IDOLATRY of the HEBREWS.

EXODUS xx. 3.

Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.

THE proneness of the Hebrew nation to fall into idolatry, presents to us a very extraordinary appearance. That nations emerging from the oblivion of barbarism should entertain absurd opinions, or make gross conjectures, concerning the unknown powers of nature, is not surprising; but that a nation favoured as were the Jews, a nation who had once received the sublime system of the universe, and whose institutions were expressly calculated to preserve it, should, at the very time they possessed this knowledge, discover a proneness to worship idols, appears very amazing. The

vulgar reason which is assigned for this, is, that the Jews were a gross people. This is, however, by no means satisfactory. The Jews were, indeed, a gross people, but not more so than other nations in the same period of improvement. On the contrary, they appear to have been more civilized than their contemporaries, and the very foundation of the difficulty is, that they were infinitely more enlightened.—I shall, therefore, in the following discourse, bestow a few thoughts upon this subject. The causes of the proneness of the Hebrew nation to idolatry are either general, or particular. They were either common to them with all the other nations of the earth in that period, or they were peculiar to their own nation.

I. In the first place, we may believe that the causes, whatever they were, which influenced all the other nations of the earth in that period, and led them to idolatry, operated also upon the Hebrew nation. A certain writer, who seems to have no object but to differ from the scriptures, affirms that, if

the worship of one God had been the first religion, mankind could never after have fallen into idolatry; and a little after speaks of the flux and reflux of the one religion continually into the other. Without attempting to reconcile these ideas, I would only observe, that the universal lapse of the ancient nations into idolatry, was, in fact, not so unnatural an event, in their circumstances, as may at first appear. Premising that they had no written rule to fix them, their deviations may be accounted for. They were led into idolatry by gradual steps. The first stage of it was plausible. It was natural for men to judge of the supreme government by the governments of the earth. Impressed with the greatness of the Universal Sovereign, they supposed, as one necessary attribute of that greatness, that he administered the world by ministers who acted under him. Believing this, it immediately became a point of consequence with them, to gain the favour, and to avert the resentment, of these ministers. Concluding from what passed upon the earth, they thought, if they could but make them their

friends, that their interests would be safe, that they would either recommend them to the Sovereign, or that their own patronage would be sufficient. This principle established, the other steps followed easily. It would lead them first to multiply their gods. They would imagine a minister for every great department of nature, and for every great division of men. It would lead them next to worship them exclusively. Accustomed to consider themselves as more immediately connected with these agents, and to ask all favours from them, they would soon come to forget the first cause altogether. This seems to have been the simple, and the true process of idolatry. One of the first errors of men in religion probably was, that the Supreme God was too great to trouble himself with the affairs of this lower world. Hence flowed easily all the other errors. The first idolatry was a mixed idolatry. It did not exclude the true God. It only associated other gods with him. At last he was forgotten, while they continued to be remembered.—Here, then, we may search for one cause of idolatry a-

mong the Hebrews. The same ideas which influenced the other nations, must also, in some degree, have influenced them. They had either a propensity to join to the worship of the Supreme God the worship of subordinate ministers; or, carried away by the universal practice, they might suppose their own God to be only one of many, and join them together.—We must also mention the rage of the times as another cause. While the idea was yet new, mankind were universally employed in developing it; and while they were intent on fixing the administration, and marking the different departments of the Supreme Government, they received every new divinity who was offered to them with all the ardour of a new discovery.—The pleasure of the process was correspondent. It gratified the imagination, by peopling all nature with ideal beings; and it flattered our ideas of the various, and the vast, by shewing that their number, their natures, and their employments, might be infinitely multiplied.—We may join to these considerations the indulgence which this religion offered to the passions. The religion

of Polytheism, from various causes, has been always understood as allowing a greater latitude to vice than the religion of one God. All that class of men, therefore, (and they are always a very numerous class) who wish to reconcile their religion with their vices, would be led naturally to favour polytheism. Idolatry, in fact, is the religion of the senses. In the countries of the East, particularly, this effect followed. The religion of the Syrians was ineffably sensual. The worship of the groves, which seems most of all to have prevailed upon the Israelites, flattered, in the highest degree, both the passions and the fancy. From the ardours of a burning sun, the votaries of the idol ascended to the tops of airy mountains, where, under the verdure of lofty trees, retired from observation and from the world, and breathing a pure air, they enjoyed at once the vastness of the prospect, and all the luxuries of the senses. Such were the causes which acted upon the ancient world, and led them to idolatry, and which had also the effect frequently of seducing the Hebrew nation.

But the Hebrews were not only influenced by causes common to them with all the nations of the earth in that period, but also by causes which were peculiar to their own nation.

I. LET me just mention their local situation. They were placed between two powerful empires, the Egyptian, and the Assyrian. These Empires were great and renowned, the splendour of their name, and the fame of their policy and achievements, had spread far and wide. It is well known how prone we are to be dazzled with external magnificence, and to admire the possessors of it. The fame of these powerful nations was well known to the Hebrews, and they aspired to share it. Accustomed to ascribe every thing to divine agency, it would occur to them, that the cause of their greatness must be owing to the gods whom they worshipped; and that, if they revered the same gods, they might have the same success. We must remember, that the policy of the Hebrews was not formed for conquest,

It must have wanted, therefore, one attraction for the young and the unexperienced.

II. BUT, secondly, the chief cause of the repeated lapses of the Hebrews into idolatry, lay deeper. We must search for it in their civil constitution, and the political parties of their state. These I shall now unfold. The institution of the kingly office, produced a material change in the government of the Hebrews. It immediately gave rise to two great political parties, which continued to distract the state, from the reign of Saul, until the Babylonish captivity.—The original government of the Hebrews was a Theocracy. This was the legal principle from which their laws and constitution, both civil and religious, flowed. The kings of the Hebrews were not kings, in any sense in which that word is now used. The Supreme Being was the real Legislator, their kings were mere substitutes of the Sovereign, and were understood to act under his appointments. It is as natural for kings to grasp at power, as it is for subjects to abuse liberty. It is not surprising, therefore, that a

set of kings should have arisen among the Hebrews, who were for extending their authority. They aspired to act for themselves, and to render themselves independent of the Legislator. A good king, who understood the constitution, and had proper impressions of his duty, would not think of it; but a bad king, who had no fear of God, no sense of true glory, no love of his country, nor regard for any thing but his own selfish aggrandisement, never failed to make the attempt. The question was first tried under the reign of Saul, and was revived uniformly, as a bad or arbitrary king arose, under the succeeding princes. The struggle between Saul and David, is the best comment upon the Hebrew constitution. The crime of Saul, as stated in the history, was setting up for himself, and attempting to render himself independent of his Superior. To defeat the effects of this, David was raised to the succession, and stated in opposition to him.—The state of the nation was at this time singular. They had two kings, whose rights were both valid, because they were founded in the same authority, a king in possession, and

a king elect. It was understood that Saul was to retain possession during his own life, and that David was to succeed him. The right of David to succeed, was as clear as that of Saul to possess, and was acknowledged even in Saul's family. The question between Saul and David was, by no means, of a personal nature. It was a question which went to the constitution. The cause at issue was, whether the peculiar policy and venerable constitution, of the Hebrew nation, were to remain, or be destroyed. If the measures of Saul had been crowned with success, and if he had been able to transmit the succession in this state to his family, there would have been an end of the peculiar constitution of the Hebrew state; and, from that moment, the Hebrews would have been sunk into the common mass of the nations. The same political parties, who commenced in the reign of Saul, continued to distract the state until the captivity. All the bad, or selfish princes, who succeeded him, pursued the same policy. Their object was to set up for themselves, like the other princes of the earth, and to free them-

selves from the controul of the Sovereign.— Here then was another powerful source of idolatry in the Hebrew nation. Whenever a king of bad principles, or mean views, arose, who wished to aggrandize his own power, and to free himself from the authority of his superior, the first measure which he would adopt for this purpose, would be to withdraw the nation, as much as possible, from the reverence which they owed to God Almighty. This he could not do better than by introducing a number of other gods, and leading the nation to offer worship to them. The idolaters, therefore, and the worshippers of one God, were in fact the court, and country parties of the Hebrews. Whether the divine government of the Hebrews was a strict theocracy, or only a patronage, makes no difference in the argument. The same consequences follow, and the same parties would arise under it.—The other causes which we have mentioned all co-operated. Men arranged themselves on the one side or the other, not only according to their political views, but also according to their characters and dispositions.

Idolatry would attract the young and the inexperienced, who admired the great empires, and would consequently be ambitious of imitating them. Idolatry would also attract all the vicious, and the sensual, who were under the dominion of the grosser passions, and would, therefore, naturally lean to the religion which indulged them. All these would naturally fall into the party of the court, and into the views of the sovereign.—We will be the less surprized at this, when we recollect the account we have given of the original principle of idolatry. We are generally very ingenious in reconciling our duty to our inclinations. The Hebrew idolaters did not mean to exclude their own God. They only joined other Gods with him. They might probably too admit, that their own God was the greatest, or even that he was the supreme God, (in their language, the God of gods) and the rest his ministers. By these, or other means, they might reconcile idolatry to their own worship. It is impossible to explain all the methods by which human ingenuity will reconcile itself to its own failings. It does

not, in fact, appear, that the Hebrew nation ever renounced their own God. They only worshipped other Gods with him. They had got fight of mixed idolatry. Their religion was connected with the parties of the state, and depended upon the constitution. Under a wise and pious king, the peculiar policy of the Hebrews was preserved, and under a king of an opposite character it was endangered.

I shall now conclude this discourse with a single reflection or two, which arise from the subject which we have been considering.

There is nothing which infidels wish more to deny than the importance of revelation. They insist that it makes no discoveries, and that we learn nothing from it but what we might know without it. Nothing can better enable us to form a judgment upon this point, than the attentive consideration of the great doctrine which we have now treated. The importance of revelation appears from the importance of the single discovery, or, if they will, promulgation, of the divine unity. This principle, whether we consider it as it relates

to truth, or as it relates to virtue, is of the first magnitude. Considered as it relates to truth, it is worth all the rest of human science put together. It discovers the first object of all science, the true system of the Universe.—It is of equal importance with respect to virtue. Exhibiting the vast world of intelligence as one universal family, it manifests at once the duties which we owe to our common parent, and to one another. It represents the immense system as arising from beneficence, and, from the same cause, as deriving permanence and stability. From this luminous principle, we discover both the beginning and the end of things; and conclude, with security, that the same native beneficence which produced, will continue our existence to us. This is the very science which we wanted to know, and which it imports us to know. Knowing this, we know what we are doing, and learn at once the object, and the duties of our existence.—Nor is the danger so great as formerly that we lose sight of this principle. We have at last discovered, and supplied the great desiderata of the an-

cient world,—fixed records, stated times of worship, and a set of men set apart from the world, and distributed through the society, to inculcate duty, and to remind mankind continually of religious truth.—Let us, then, be careful to second their endeavours. Remembering that the very first principle of all valuable knowledge is, “Thou shalt have no other Gods before me,” let us meditate frequently upon this luminous and great doctrine. Let us conceive its importance by viewing its various consequences, and the magnificent and stupendous system which arises from it.—Finally, let us study to convert it into an active principle. Viewing him as the supreme good, let us aspire to be united with him. Let us love him with our whole hearts, and give him our best affections. Contemplating his universal family, let us also learn to love one another. This is religion. On these hang the law and the prophets.

(333)

SERMON VIII.

On the RETURN of the JEWS from
BABYLON.

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EZRA 1. 1, 2, 3, 4.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,

Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, the Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God) which is in Jerusalem.

And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the free will offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.

THE nation of the Hebrews may be considered as the most remarkable of all nations. They were selected, and separated, by the hand of Providence, from the rest of the world. They were distinguished from other nations not only by their religion, laws, and manners, but by the very object of their political society. That mutual comfort, and protection, which is the great end of all other societies, was with them but secondary. Their great object was to preserve knowledge in the midst of ignorance, and the true system of the world amidst universal error and delusion. By the true system of the world, I do not mean the laws of the planets, but a knowledge infinitely more sublime,—the knowledge of the causes, the ends, and the moral government, of the universe.

The sacred writings of the Hebrews, or in other words the scriptures, are the books in which this knowledge is preserved. Besides their other evidence, these writings bear many internal characters of truth. Of these the text affords us a very illustrious instance. The edict of Cyrus, and the return of the Jews from Babylon, form a very remarkable proof of the truth of the scripture history, and open to us a very extensive field of observation. These it shall be the business of this discourse to illustrate. In order to this, I shall begin with just noticing the circumstances which preceded, and the prophecies which described, this event.

That the Jewish nation were placed in the province of Babylon, and that they lived there for a considerable time, is very generally, I believe, indeed, universally admitted. I shall, therefore, waste no time here in proving it.

Of the prophets who predicted the Babylonish Captivity, the most remarkable are Isaiah and Jeremiah. The latter is so very particular as to predict the exact number of

years which they were to remain in Babylon. The former, (which is still more amazing), not only predicts their captivity and return, but names the very prince who was to release them, above two hundred years before he was born. They both predict the ruin of the Chaldean empire, and the rise of the Median, and fix upon this as the æra of the Jewish deliverance. The surrounding empires are represented by the prophets as instruments in the hand of God to execute his great purposes upon the earth. To the people of the Jews especially they are described as having a very particular respect. The ruin of the Egyptian empire was to be the immediate cause of their captivity; and the overthrow of the Chaldean was to be made, in like manner, the immediate cause of their deliverance.

The first effect of the Babylonish captivity was to recover the nation from idolatry. Prone as they were before to that vice, (a vice which was destructive of the very object of their political society), they were never afterwards addicted to it. The event, therefore, of that measure verifies the history given of it in the

scriptures. It shews, that idolatry was understood to be the cause of that misfortune; and accordingly it was, from that time, considered universally as the most capital offence in that nation.

But the deliverance of the Jews from Babylon is not only a proof of the divine authority of the scriptures, considered as a splendid prophecy; but affords an additional proof of it considered in another light. That the Jews were regarded, by the other nations, as a venerable people, and as possessed of a mysterious knowledge, we have ample testimonies. The transplanting of them to Babylon would give the world an opportunity to judge of their pretensions. We may believe that the Chaldeans, who were themselves a vain nation, and who valued themselves upon their own superior knowledge, would watch their captives with jealousy, and endeavour to discover whether they merited the high character which was ascribed to them. In a foreign country, amidst the enemies of their nation and of their faith, they could expect no connivance. They would be regarded with a

suspicious eye, and their pretensions would be examined with severity. We find the Chaldeans accordingly calling them to perform the beautiful service of the temple, and demanding an example of the music, and the songs of Zion. This occasioned that beautiful composition, "we sat, and wept, by the streams of Babel."—But what is a stronger proof of their national character, and would put it to the severest test, was the measure which the king took to select some of the principal Jewish youth, and to have them educated for the court. This would afford that monarch an opportunity of judging decisively concerning the character of that nation. We have the history of this experiment recorded in the book of Daniel. Four distinguished Jews, who had been lifted to the view of the empire, perform such miracles, and discover such profound wisdom and foreknowledge, as excite the most universal and undisputed admiration. The effect was so astonishing, that the king raised them to the first offices of the state, and published edicts throughout his dominions, announcing

the God of the Jews as the supreme power of nature, and appointing him to be received, and regarded as such by his whole subjects. The same effect is represented by the Jewish historian as taking place under Belshazzar, and under Darius. The same display of divine power, and the same public edicts, are renewed under two empires, and under three successive reigns.—Now, I say, that the return of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, is not only a proof of the divine authority of the Scriptures, considered as the accomplishment of a prophecy; but it is an additional proof of it in this light, that it affords a strong internal presumption that the history which Daniel gives of the manifestations of divine power in Chaldea, during the residence of the Jews in that country, were true. If the nation of the Jews had, upon trial, been found impostors, Cyrus must have known it; and if Cyrus had regarded them in this light, he would not have afforded them his protection.—That we may place this argument in a stronger light, let us consider the full importance of the measure which

Cyrus now adopted, and of the benefit which he conferred upon the Jews. The practice of slavery among the ancient nations is well known. The slaves were, in that period, one great branch of property. The riches of a family, or of a state, were estimated not more by the land, the money, or the merchandize, which they possessed, than by the number of slaves whom they occupied. The slaves cultivated the land, did the household business, exercised the necessary trades, and, in general, performed all that labour in which the mass of the people are now employed. The slaves, therefore, formed one great portion of private property, and of the national stock.—The slaves arose chiefly, among ancient nations, from the captives taken in war. This was the great fund from which they were supplied, and constituted a very considerable branch of the profits which accrued to the conquerors in the ancient wars. They estimated the profits of the war, not more by the extent of territory which they gained, than by the number of slaves whom they captured. The captives were immediately reduced to slavery, and

were either employed by the state in its public works, or were exposed to sale, and purchased by individuals. Hence they became incorporated into the national property, and formed one solid mass with the money, the merchandize, and the land.—From this view, we will be enabled to conceive how very difficult it must have been in ancient times for men who were once reduced to slavery to regain their liberty. The interests of the state, as well as the rights and properties of individuals, were all against them. Where there were so many interests to be consulted, so many properties to be separated, and so many private rights to be resumed, we may conclude that the liberating of the slaves, among the ancient nations, must have been a very arduous state measure.—This accounts perfectly for the difficulty which the Jewish nation found in their attempt to emigrate from Egypt. The freeing of a great body of six hundred thousand men, was parting with a very considerable portion of their property; and accordingly we find that the Egyptians resisted this measure to the last, with the most

determined obstinacy. Private persons have sometimes given a slave his liberty, as a reward for some distinguished service; but it was impossible, under the ancient manners, for any considerable body of men to be set free, without some cause which was very extraordinary.—In the edict of Cyrus, then, and the return of the Jews from Babylon, we have a very uncommon piece of history presented to us. That conqueror, among the other valuable property of the vanquished empire, found a whole nation of slaves. This, according to the ideas of these times, was an immense acquisition. It was, in fact, an immense property, the value of which, to a political prince like Cyrus, must have been fully known. Yet we find this politic, and wise prince, giving liberty at once to this whole nation, and sending them back, after seventy years captivity, into their own country. It is this extraordinary circumstance which Isaiah describes, and of the value of which he appears fully sensible, when he says, in his prophecy of Cyrus: “He shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor

"reward."—Nor was this a sudden resolution. It was not adopted in the moment of victory, nor meant to exhibit a momentary triumph over the vanquished. The Jews remained in the same state in which they had lived under the Chaldeans during one entire reign of the new empire.—I say, then, that this transaction affords a strong proof of the credit in which the Jewish nation then were in Babylon, and that the history which Daniel gives of the manifestations of divine power, which were made, during that period, and by the agency of that nation, in the province of Chaldea, were true. This point depends not, by any means, upon the common proofs of history. The transaction proves itself. There are no data here necessary, but to believe that the nation of the Jews were in Babylon, and that they returned from it. Their return proves the history. It supposes all that is related, and cannot otherwise be accounted for. We first find the Jews in Babylon, and we find them afterwards settled in their own country. The obvious question which arises

here is, how did this happen? We must either suppose that the Jews overpowered the Persians, and made their way into their own country by force, or that some extraordinary cause took place at that time, and moved the Persians to liberate them. The history which Daniel gives, affords a satisfactory solution of it. Under the Chaldean government, the Jews, though a captive people, rose, by the good hand of their God upon them, as they themselves express it, to the first offices of the empire. Upon the overthrow of that empire, when it might certainly have been expected that all the officers of the old government would have been displaced or perished, the Jewish officers were continued in the same splendour, and in the same high degree of power. The sovereigns of both empires gave repeated testimonies in their favour. They maintained the same high degree of credit under four successive reigns. Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus, agreed in issuing public edicts to the empire, notifying the divine powers they were connected with, and requiring all the provinces to receive the

God of the Jews, and to acknowledge him as the supreme God. It is affirmed, that, in this period, the God of the Hebrews was acknowledged throughout the extensive provinces of Chaldea and Persia. At last, the body of the Jews, whom the people they lived with regarded as a sacred nation, obtain their liberty, and are restored to their country. This is the history which is presented to us by their own writers; and the actual return of the Jews from their captivity, and resettlement in their own country, in opposition to so many complicated rights, in opposition to so many great interests, and in opposition to the universal practice of mankind in that period, suppose this history, and are a full proof of its authenticity.

I shall now conclude this subject with a few observations.

Let me, then, in the first place, call your attention to that simple, but steady plan, which has been carried on, from the beginning, by divine wisdom, for the improvement of the world. In the single nation of the Monotheists, we discern that small seed whose

branches were finally to arise, and to overshadow the whole earth. Amidst the errors in which mankind had involved themselves, the Supreme Being is careful to preserve a fund of knowledge, from which all the nations of the earth might, in due time, be enlightened. With this view, he adopts the measure of selecting a particular nation, with whom he deposits the history of the world, and of its government, and whom he makes at last the means of diffusing it throughout the nations. The history and doctrines of this people are so contrived, as mutually to illustrate one another; and they exhibit a scene, which not only combines their own peculiar policy with the revolutions of the surrounding empires, but with the history and state of the human species in all ages.

Let us observe, then, secondly, the importance of the Hebrew nation in the general system of the world. Certain well known writers, who profess, with much parade of candour, to give the history of manners, and not of battles, and to estimate the value of nations, not by their extent of territory, but by the

improvement of their reason, have, with their usual consistency, affected to despise the Jews, because they were not a great nation. We must seldom try infidelity by its own rules, because, if we did, we would generally find it to be credulity. The rule which these writers lay down is good. To estimate a nation by the battles which it has fought, or the countries it has conquered, is, generally speaking, to estimate it, in other words, by the hurt it has done, and the injustice of which it has been guilty. It is a fair and plain rule, to estimate the value of a nation by its usefulness. Now, in this light, the Hebrews, in the opinion of every impartial man, will remain unrivalled. All the great empires which rose around them, are no more. Like the pageants of a public exhibition, they appeared, and passed away. We are not obliged to affirm, that these empires were raised solely on account of the Jews; but it cannot, at least, be denied, that their revolutions were made subservient to them. Their battles and conquests, probably, answered the usual purposes of war; which is never directly beneficial, but

on the contrary, must, in its own nature, be destructive. Their objects, whatever they might be, were temporary. Like instruments in the hand of the master, they were used and thrown aside. The same thing may be said of the latter empires. Their objects were all temporary. They are now perished, and it is certainly a very pertinent question for us, to ask, What advantage they have produced, or what scheme of beneficial policy they have left us? I do not except the Romans, those professed civilizers of the globe; whose maxim it was to rob first, and to insist upon justice being observed afterwards. The history of the great empires, is a history of the devastations of the globe. Their rise and fall equally convulsed the world, and heaped it with scenes of ruin and destruction. Mankind, emerging into civility, found themselves repeatedly forced back into barbarity. Such are the nations whom our vanity admires, nations whom providence seems to have used as instruments of vengeance, and who produced the effect of pestilence. Destructive in their existence, they were still more destructive in

their fall, and left no lesson to posterity, except a lesson which they will not learn, of the vanity of battles, and the folly of great empires.—But the nation of the Jews was different. The object of their policy was beneficial, and the effects of it have been permanent. If a nation is to be estimated by its knowledge, the object of the Hebrew nation was to preserve knowledge. With them was lodged the true system of the world, and in them was held out an illustrious example of the connexion between the Supreme Being and his creation. While the other nations seemed to know no policy but how they might best rob, or massacre one another, the object of the Hebrew policy was God Almighty. The situation of man, and government of the universe; the knowledge of God, and the worship due to him; the study of his laws, and admiration of his works; were the leading principles of their political constitution. These were their great national objects, and the subjects of their great national establishments. Judea was the temple of the world, where the fires of genuine piety were kept alive, and

where the Supreme Being received the homage of his creation. In their singular policy, the authority of God and of the state was the same;—religion was loyalty, and law was duty. They were constituted literally a holy nation, and a peculiar people. Disgusted as we are with the transactions of so many idolatrous nations, (which are constantly a return of the same absurdities) can we see nothing important, or nothing curious, in the only nation of monotheists which antiquity presents to us?—But the object of the Jewish policy, illustrious as it was in itself, extended its effects beyond their own nation and age. The knowledge which they preserved was the sacred seed which was to be scattered over the whole earth. It was destined to pervade the nations, and to unite them into one society. While the other nations, with their institutions, have passed away, the effects of the Jewish policy remain. Even now that policy operates, and is felt throughout our whole system. The Jewish nation has produced the most important revolution in the opinions of mankind

which they have ever experienced. Was the discovery of the laws by which the planets revolve, thought an important æra in the history of the human mind? And did it confer deserved reputation upon its author? But what is the knowledge of the planets, to the knowledge of the moral government of the universe? Will any man affirm that they can be compared together? The passing of the world from polytheism to monotheism, from the absurd belief of many gods to the knowledge of one God, the Creator and Preserver, the supreme and perfect Being, the Legislator and the Sovereign of his creation, is the most important revolution which has ever taken place, or which can possibly take place, within our system. The revolutions of empires are common occurrences, which merely shift the scale, and have no permanent effect. But the knowledge of our state here, that knowledge which carries us back to the creating hand of God, places us under his universal government, and opens to us the glorious prospects of his eternal reign, is a knowledge substantial, and interesting. Be-

fore it, all other questions appear little, and all other knowledge vain.—But great as the effects of the Jewish policy upon our system have been, we expect effects still greater. The views which Christianity holds up to the world, rational as they are in themselves, and more and more illustrated by experience, must continue to operate. The political system of the world has been hitherto founded in division. The time approaches when it will be founded in union. We expect the reign of peace, when the nations, acknowledging one God, shall consider themselves as one society. They will at last make the great discovery, that their interests are the same, and that their happiness is mutual.—In the meantime, in contemplating the bright scenes which lie before us, while we ascribe the first praise to God, let us also remember that once favoured people, who were made the means of enlightening us. Let us study their important history, and give due merit to their policy. Let us also remember them in our prayers. As they were the means of our improvement, may we be the means of theirs. As they

were brought back from the streams of Babel, may they be yet gathered from all nations, and united under the true Messiah. They are the Israelites. To them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants. Theirs was the giving of the law, the service, and the promises. Theirs were the fathers, and of them sprang the Messiah. Ah! once happy people! Ah! favoured nation! What vicissitudes have been yours?—Finally, let us give thanks to God that he has confirmed our faith by such undoubted testimony. At every era of the sacred history, new evidence arises before us. The return of the Jews from Babylon affords one strong instance. Their dispersion proclaims another. In every period, that nation has been destined to confirm the truth, and to publish the supreme government to the nations.

SERMON XI.

On the HISTORY and CHARACTER of RE-
VEALED RELIGION.

[Preached at the Celebration of the LORD'S SUPPER.]

DEUTERONOMY xviii. 15.

The Lord thy God, will raise up unto thee a Prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me, unto him shall ye hearken,

THE enemies of revelation advance one objection against it, which, at first sight, has the appearance of being plausible. They ask, why our religion was revealed so gradually? Why was it delivered to us in parts, and at periods so extremely distant? If the world lay in darkness, and divine light was necessary, why was not that light bestowed at once? If it was to be given at all, why not

give it fully at the beginning, or why suffer mankind to remain a moment ignorant? The sooner so divine a gift was communicated, the better; and the more perfect the communication was, the greater effects we might expect from it.—Waving the other answers to this objection, we shall mention one which seems decisive. Such is the nature of the human mind, that, if it meets with no objects but those to which it is accustomed, it becomes remiss, and inattentive. Some degree of novelty, some striking revolution, is necessary, at convenient periods, to interest the passions, and put it again in motion. Without this, it would lose gradually every active power, and sink into a complete lethargy. This observation will explain fully the objection which respects religion*. If the whole light of revelation had been bestowed at once, the world would, in a short time, have lost the benefit of it. Having nothing farther to interest them, they would have lost

* The same observation may be applied to human knowledge, and human improvements.

all attention, and acquired the most invincible habits of indolence and of neglect. To keep their attention, therefore, always alive, it was necessary that the Supreme Being should make his revelations gradually; not all at once, but, as the Apostle expresses it, at sundry times, and also in divers manners. Accordingly we find, that his revelations were successively made at the most proper time; and that every revolution in religion happened at the critical period when mankind were in danger of falling asleep, and had the effect to renew their attention when it had died away, and to interest them afresh in the cause of virtue and of truth. We might pursue this observation through all the changes which religion has sustained, and all the forms it has assumed, from the beginning of the world to the present time;—through the æra of tradition, the patriarchal period, the Jewish law, the Christian system, the hierarchy of Rome, the reformation, and, lastly, the successive struggles of truth with error in the later attempts of infidels. It would appear from all these (which I cannot now be more particular upon) that it is

necessary, at proper intervals, to awaken the attention of men; and that every revolution which religion has undergone, though it may not have been attended with every agreeable circumstance, has been for the interest of truth and virtue.—But we shall confine ourselves here to the appearance of Jesus Christ, and the revolution which that produced. It will confirm what we have now advanced, to observe, that, when the Jewish system was delivered, the utmost care was taken, that the views of the Jewish nation should not terminate in what was then revealed to them. Even from the beginning, their attention was excited, and their expectations kept alive, with the prospect of something farther, by their great Lawgiver himself. “The Lord thy God
“ will raise up unto thee a prophet, from the
“ midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me,
“ unto him shall ye hearken.”

Not thinking it necessary to prove, what all Christians believe, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah promised to the world, and that he was invested with all the offices of that high character; in discoursing farther upon this

subject, I shall confine myself to that part of his public character which is set forth to us in this prediction, and shall illustrate the principle which we have now laid down, by the following method.

I. I shall shew that, in this view, he made his appearance in the world at a most proper period.

II. I shall consider, in the same view, the general character of revelation, and particularly of Christianity.

III. And, lastly, I shall finish the argument, by collecting such inferences and conclusions as may arise from the subject, and correspond to the occasion of our present meeting.

I. I AM to shew that, in the view which I have given of religion, Jesus Christ made his appearance in the world at a most proper period.

Let us examine, then, in what state the world was, and whether the influence of the first religions had not failed universally when

Jesus Christ appeared. Let us then consider whether his appearance did not revive it.

This is considering the religions of the world in a point of view different from the mere absurdities of them. It is supposing that, however absurd they may have been, they had once some influence, but that this influence had now ceased.

With respect to the first, it will require no labour of reasoning to shew, that, when the argument of Christianity was published, the world had sunk into an entire indifference with respect to religious subjects. The spirit of religion, both among the Jews and Gentiles, was lost, and only the forms remained. With respect to the Gentiles, will it be admitted as a proof of the little attention which religion then drew, that, even when they were enlightened, in the highest degree, by the sciences and the arts, their religious creed, and religious worship, were as absurd as ever? It is a mistake to suppose that the religions of idolatry never had any influence; for, in the first ages, their influence was considerable. Making allowance for that tendency to cor-

ruption which flowed from the principle, and which continued more and more to manifest itself, the impression of the innumerable invincible powers with which men supposed themselves surrounded, was at first strong; and, while their habits of thinking remained simple, their conceptions of these powers were respectable. They considered them as interested for justice, and as the guardians of good faith, and of hospitality. But as these impressions wore away, the indifference which naturally succeeds, and the effects which it invariably produces, began to manifest themselves. It was one defect peculiar to the idolatrous religions, (and it hastened their issue) that men having no fixed standard of divinity, their Gods were in effect of their own forming. The consequence of this was, that, conceiving of their deities according to their own dispositions, they made them gradually what they wished them to be; the character of their divinities declined with the virtues of their votaries; and, instead of raising themselves to their gods, they brought down their gods at last to their own standard. In pro-

portion as their respect abated, their indifference must have increased, and the hold of religion upon their minds diminished. The force of the religious principle destroyed, another necessary effect manifested itself. Under a religion where men offered gifts to their divinities, their offerings must have multiplied in exact proportion as their morality declined, until at last their whole religion would be reduced to them. This would follow the more readily as it was supported by the vanity and the sensuality of their worshippers; and would be regarded as a convenient substitute for a piety which they no longer felt, and for virtues which they were no longer disposed to cultivate.—These observations express no more than the history of their religion itself, and the actual state of the world at the appearance of Jesus Christ. To be convinced of the indifference of men to religion in that period, and how little they were influenced by it, we may consider, first, their opinions. Some of them thought the world was eternal, and others that it was produced by accident. They either denied a God entirely, or thought

he was taken up with higher matters than to give himself any concern about men, or the small events of this world. Such were the principles of their enlightened men, and we may judge from these of what importance *they* thought religion.—With respect to the multitude, they were, in no degree, more zealous. They went, indeed, through the common services of religion, but what were these services? Their religion consisted entirely in an endless repetition of external forms, which neither affected the heart, nor could, in any degree, improve the understanding. They offered sacrifices, assisted at feasts, and observed dreams and omens. By these, their minds were drawn away from real religion, and, indeed, they did not know what it consisted in.—If we may judge of the state of their religion from the prevalence of vice among them, we will soon see that, whatever it might once have been, it had, at that period, entirely lost its influence. What a horrid picture do the first preachers of Christianity, as well as their own historians, give of the manners and the vices of their own period? If the Pagan reli-

gions had any use, it was in teaching men that an oath was sacred, and that the gods were the avengers of perjury. Yet even this had at last ceased; for their gods, such as they were, either drew respect no longer, or they thought them so mercenary, that a sacrifice would atone for any crimes; or so partial, that they patronized men of every character who professed to be their votaries. A religion, founded on such principles, could not possibly retain its influence, and must even have corrupted, instead of improving, the manners and dispositions of the human species. —Accordingly, at the appearance of Christianity, the morals of men were corrupted in the most extreme degree. All the vices which proceed from luxury, from lust, from avarice, and from licentious principles of every kind, were carried to the greatest height, without the least scruple from religion, and without the least check from conscience. Religion, indeed, had arrived at that point, that it was employed to lull the conscience, instead of alarming it, by teaching men how easily crimes of every kind might be compounded for. It

taught them, in the plainest terms, that, so far as the Gods were concerned, they might commit with impunity what crimes they pleased, provided they observed a few ceremonies, and offered a few sacrifices. Any virtue, then, which remained among the nations at that period, was not owing to religion.—Nor was the Jewish nation in a better state. The history of religion among them was the same as among the Gentiles. They had substituted the forms of religion in the room of religion itself; these forms engrossed their whole attention; while the spirit of religion was lost, and its duties disregarded. They even thought, with the rest of mankind, that the observance of these forms would compensate for the neglect of the most important duties, and the commission of the greatest crimes. Hence their regard to God was mere formality, and their professions of religion were become one entire delusion. How beautifully do their own prophets plead with them upon this point? And in what severe terms does our divine Master arraign their teachers as the supporters of these principles, and the cor-

ruptors of the people? The prophet Micah brings in a Jew reasoning in the following manner: "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" This reasoning shews what *they* thought religion consisted in; and the answer to it shews, what parts of religion they neglected.—"He hath shewed thee, O man! what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Hear also Isaiah upon the same subject: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me, saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me, the new moons and sab-

“baths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with, it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons, and your appointed feasts, my soul hateth : they are a trouble unto me, I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you : yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear : your hands are full of blood,” &c. They thought, in short, that the whole of religion consisted in presenting themselves in the temple, assisting at the usual feasts, and offering the usual sacrifices.—This principle, so flattering to the propensity of the human heart to vice, continued to corrupt their religion, notwithstanding the exhortations of all their prophets, and appeared in its greatest strength, when Jesus Christ began his ministry. It is, indeed, the great corruption which he inveighs against, and which he opposes with such strength of argument, and of reproof. He attacks their teachers chiefly, as men who knew better, and yet contributed, by their absurd doctrines, to continue the delusion. “Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hy-

“pocrites, for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise,
“and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy,
“and faith; these ought ye to have done, and
“not to leave the others undone. Ye blind
“guides! which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.” And so in numerous other passages,—With respect both to Jews and Gentiles, the cause of their indifference was the same. The repeating of the same rites, and going over the same forms, without deviation, so often, had rendered them at last insipid, and produced the most absolute indifference to the whole subject. The superior knowledge, too, and superior improvement of the human mind, had rendered the imperfections of their worship on all sides more visible; and this also was another very natural source of indifference. Upon the whole, it is evident, that, in this period, religion had entirely lost her influence; and that the grossest vices, accompanied and supported by the most pernicious principles, prevailed among all sects, and in all quarters of the world.

Here, then, was a time proper, if any period could be so, for a divine interposition. The religions of mankind, whatever they were, had lost their influence, men had fallen asleep, and their attention was destroyed. If religion was of any consequence, it was high time to come to its assistance. It was necessary, at that period, to revive it, or suffer it to be quite extinguished. The appearance of Messiah had this effect. That personage, towards whom the Jewish religion pointed, and in whom its prophets terminated; that personage, who was shadowed by so many rites, and ushered by so many predictions; appeared at the proper period, and completed a system which had been delivering from the beginning, in successive, though unequal portions, to the nations.

III. I PROCEED, then, in the third place, to consider the general character of Revelation, and particularly of Christianity: an enquiry which the foregoing history of religion leads us to, and will enable us to determine.

The internal evidence of revelation, that evidence which arises from the excellence of its doctrines, has been always considered as one of the most eminent of those arguments by which our religion is supported. This evidence commenced at the beginning, and has been continued, with increasing force, to the completion of our religious system. There is one point of view from which it has not, I believe, been generally contemplated. Take our religion at any one period, and it exhibits an interesting contrast to all the religions round it. At the time when Abraham was worshipping one supreme God, the Chaldeans, his native nation, the Egyptians, to whom he travelled, and the Canaanites, with whom he lived, were gross idolaters. What reason, then, can be assigned why Abraham, in the midst of idolaters, acknowledged one God, and rejected idol-worship? What reason can be assigned, why he alone entertained the most exalted conceptions of Deity, as one being, the possessor of heaven and earth; while his native people, and all the surrounding nations, admitted a multitude of gods,

and worshipped the grossest images? Had his education been superior to that of the men he lived with, or were his natural opportunities greater? In like manner, when Moses led the nation of Israel from the land of Egypt to the land of Canaan, both the country he went from, and the country to which he was going, were sunk in the grossest idolatry. Their ignorance, and the absurdity of their religious notions, exceeded all conception. How, then, did it happen, that, in the midst of all this, Moses delivered the doctrine of the true God, and gave men a reasonable religion? Can any human cause be assigned for this? Was there any particular people, at that time, to whom Moses could be indebted for his system? Or was there any particular seat of learning, where he could have acquired his knowledge? Nothing of all this was the case, nor was it possible that the knowledge either of Abraham, or of Moses, could have been derived from any other source than that which they themselves assigned for it,—the Supreme Being himself, and his immediate revelation.

The same argument, the same proof of divine original, was continued in favour of Christianity. At the appearance of Jesus Christ, not only the Gentile nations, but the Jewish, were plunged in gross worship. The superstitious practices of the former had been transmitted, and the wise institutions of the latter had been corrupted, or misinterpreted. The Jewish doctors understood not the principles, and had corrupted the doctrines of their own religion. The great duties were explained away, and the temporary institutions were considered as perpetual.—The religion of the Jews, as well as of all other nations, was expressed by sacrifices. So universal was the worship of sacrifices, and so long had it been continued, that men had no idea of religion without them. The Jews and Gentiles agreed perfectly in the sacrificial system, with no other difference than this, that the former offered sacrifices to one God, and the latter to many. In the midst of this arose a man who introduced the religion of the affections, and rejected sacrificial worship. In the room of a religion which was address-

ed to the senses, he proposed one which had no connection with them ; and, instead of sacrifices and outward forms, he substituted the devotion of the heart, and the practice of the plain duties.—The religion of sacrifices was more ancient, as well as more universal, than idolatry itself. The passing from the sacrificial worship to the worship of the affections, was as great a revolution in religion, as the passing from idolatry to the worship of the one God. Moses had adventured upon the one of these, but did not attempt the other. While he called his nation to the worship of one God, he proposed not to abolish sacrifices. He contented himself with establishing the first point, but did not enter upon the second. As little did he bring forward the doctrine of a future state, or the universal government of the supreme Being. Religion hardly raised her views above the earth, and the divine favour was thought to be confined to one nation. It was reserved for the great author of Christianity to complete the work. In the midst of gross worship, and partial ideas of divine government, Jesus Christ arose. He not only

exposed the corruptions, but threw new light upon the principles of religion. Considering the religion of Moses as only the first part of the system, he took upon him to propose the second. He distinguished what was temporary from what was perpetual; he added what was proper; and, from the whole, proposed a system which was as far superior to the religion of Moses, as that religion had been to the other systems.—I say, then, that the same proof of divine original was here continued, and that Jesus Christ appears in the same light, with respect to his own nation, as Abraham and Moses did with respect to the people they lived with. For, let me ask, from what cause Christianity could proceed? The founder of our faith, considered in his private character, was born, and lived among the Jews. He had not travelled among other nations, nor enjoyed superior advantages, nor opportunities of any kind, above his countrymen. So far from this, it would be easy to shew, that the very reverse was true. How, then, did it happen, that a man so humble, without even common education or oppor-

tunities, conceived such sublime ideas, and entertained such extensive views? What reason can be assigned why he offered a system to his nation which was different from their received notions, (the notions which he himself had been brought up with) and which placed religion in a point of view, which was immediately seen to be superior to the doctrines and views of their most famous sects and teachers? From what cause could it proceed, that he turned his views to the system of Moses itself, considered it as unfinished, and at once proposed to complete it? I speak not merely of the corruptions which he exposed, but of the Jewish law itself, as delivered by their legislator Moses. This would have been thought a bold step, even for the first men of their nation; but their first men had no such ideas. Yet a private man conceived these ideas, and proposed them, with the highest wisdom, to the nation. An endless train of ceremonies reduced, a future state brought forward, the whole system of sacrifices abolished, religion exhibited in its most simple form; and, instead of being confined to one

nation, as it had always been hitherto, extended at once to the whole tribes of mankind, —were the principles of that system which Jesus Christ proposed to the world. Nor did he propose this system as destructive of the Jewish religion. He shewed the same wisdom here, and proved that he understood the views of their lawgiver, while their doctors and learned men had universally misconceived them. He represented Moses as by no means proposing his revelation as the last, but as looking forward to a future prophet, who was to appear, at a distant period, and complete it. By this view, he connected the two together, and shewed that it was a continuation of the same system, and that the one part was the necessary completion of the other. These ideas he proposed at a time when the whole nation was in an error with respect to their own Messiah; and intoxicated with fancies, which the expounders of their law encouraged, of a temporal king, and universal empire. Here he shewed them the meaning of their own books, and gave a sense to their prophecies which they had not before been viewed

in, but which was necessary to render them consistent. All this is surely very extraordinary. Jesus Christ, amidst the Jewish nation, appears in the light of a man who had been translated from an enlightened society, and placed amidst a gross and unenlightened people. Abraham and Moses had the same appearance. Yet there was in their times no such society. The conclusion is forcible. They derived their knowledge, therefore, from God. — This argument will appear the stronger, so far as the founder of our religion is concerned, when we consider the strength of the Jewish prejudices, and how irrecoverably that nation was devoted to its own modes of thinking. That a Jew should talk with indifference of the ceremonies of Moses; that a Jew should reject sacrifices; that a Jew should say, “the hour cometh, when ye shall, neither in this place, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the father; but the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth;” or, that a Jew, in that age, relinquishing his ideas of conquest, should explain the Messiah into a

religious character; will appear impossible to any man who is acquainted, in the lowest degree, with the religious tenets, and the national maxims of that people. This observation holds particularly with respect to the idea of an universal religion, or extending the divine revelations, in an equal, and impartial manner, to the nations. It was not from a Jew that such a system could be expected; these were ideas which a man of that nation could not have thought of; and which shew sufficiently the source from which the founder of our faith derived them.

I have always thought this a very striking, as well as beautiful, argument in favour of revelation; the existence of a rational religion in the midst of ignorance and superstition. In every period, revelation is a phenomenon which cannot be accounted for, but upon supposition of the agency of a superior power. It exhibits the appearance of a blaze of light, continued amidst a night of darkness. By the same process, religion is successively revived, and the evidence of it is continued. The Jewish religion was as conspicuous amidst

heathen, as the Christian religion was afterwards, amidst Jewish worship. In every period, there appear traces of the same hand exerting itself in the preservation of truth, and carrying a great system forward.

But the most beautiful view of our religion, and I have reserved it on that account to the last, is its *universality*. One conspicuous part of its excellence arises from the impartial ideas which it brings forward of the divine government. The progress of religion, in all respects, forms a very admirable speculation. The movements of a mighty empire are deliberate and gradual. The Supreme Being delights to unfold the events of the world in a connected and progressive order. From simple beginnings, he conducts them forward to a just and perfect form. The history of religion corresponds with this order. The progress of it was gradual, from the first elements of Jewish law, to the more perfect form of Christianity. The two revelations were connected strictly by the correspondence of their material parts. The observances and prophecies of the one received their accom-

plishment in the doctrines and events of the other. The improvements of religion, and its internal excellence, were gradually unfolded. It proceeded from shadows to realities, from forms to substance. It advanced, from ceremonies and outward rites, to a spiritual and simple worship. It was revealed first to one nation, and was extended afterwards to the whole earth. This is the most beautiful view which we can take of our religion, and affords a strong presumption of its divine original. Christianity announced itself as the universal religion. Under the Jewish religion, the Supreme Being was the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Under the Christian religion, he is held out as the God of the whole earth. The Christian religion was confined to no place, or people, but proposed to unite and comprehend all nations. The great object of Christianity is to collect mankind, who had been divided, by various causes, from one another, and unite them into one great society, under one supreme and universal government. This was just such a religion as we might expect from a universal

being, who may be supposed naturally to be interested equally in all his works. But as this also was totally different from the ideas of the Jews, (who were for confining the divine favour to their own nation), it will confirm this whole argument, to shew that, however much they misconceived it, it was, from the beginning, a material part of the whole system; and that the acts of the apostles, respecting this point, are not more explicit than the predictions of the prophets.

The predictions of the Old Testament which relate to this subject, are of so remarkable a nature, as to deserve a separate consideration. I have reserved them, therefore, for this place. The Apostle, when he speaks of the mystery which was hid from ages, seems to point chiefly to these predictions. They are called a mystery with great propriety, because they were not, nor, indeed, could be understood, until the events explained them. A Jew would never have interpreted them in this sense. He had no idea of an universal religion; he considered it as confined to his own nation; and entertained not the slightest sus-

picion that it was ever to be extended beyond it. Hence the rage of the Jews against the Christian preachers, whom they considered as attempting to divest their nation of its peculiar honours, by raising the Gentiles to a level with them, and communicating their revelations to strangers. Hence also the hesitation of these teachers themselves. They seem at first not to have understood this part of the Christian system, and hesitated, for some time, to impart the gospel to the Gentiles, as being contrary to all their former ideas, and preconceived opinions upon this subject. Yet the prophets had conceived this event, and predicted, with amazing plainness, the calling of the Gentile nations. This, indeed, was the most brilliant part of their predictions, and completed their views of the supreme empire. They saw an empire arising in the latter days, after the other empires, and extending itself over the whole earth. How beautifully does the Prophet Isaiah describe this period! "I am sought of them that
"asked not for me; I am found of them that
"sought me not: I said, behold me, behold

“ me, unto a nation that was not called by
“ my name. Sing, O barren, thou that didst
“ not bear, break forth into singing, and cry
“ aloud, thou that didst not travail with child,
“ for more are the children of the desolate
“ than the children of the married wife, saith
“ the Lord. Behold I will lift up my hand to
“ the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the
“ people. Is it a light thing that thou shouldst
“ be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob,
“ and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will
“ also give thee for a light to the Gentiles,
“ that thou mayest be my salvation to the
“ ends of the earth. Arise, shine, for thy
“ light is come, and the glory of the Lord is
“ risen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall
“ come to thy light, and kings to the bright-
“ ness of thy rising. The people that walk-
“ ed in darkness have seen a great light: they
“ that dwell in the land of the shadow of
“ death, upon them hath the light shined.
“ Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is
“ given, and the government shall be laid
“ upon his shoulders; and his name shall be
“ called Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty

“ God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of
“ Peace. Of the increase of his government
“ and peace, there shall be no end.” From
these, and many more predictions, it is evident, that the Jewish prophets, considering God as the common Parent, foresaw the period when he would extend his favours to all nations, and when the Gentiles and the Jews should be united, without distinction, into one universal empire. This was the great revolution in which their predictions terminated; it was the last form of the world; and completed their views of the Divine Government. A prospect so extended, seems to have elevated their conceptions to an uncommon height. They look forward, with delight, to the period of their own predictions; and contemplate, with the highest admiration, both the events themselves, and the great Personage who was to unfold them.

I have now finished this argument, and shall conclude my discourse upon it with such inferences and observations as naturally arise before us, and as correspond to the present

service. These observations are numerous, and suggest enquiries of the first magnitude.

I. We have seen a series of revelations, unfolding themselves in a gradual succession, and terminating at last in the enlightening of the whole earth. The Supreme Being has approved himself, not the God of a particular people, but the common Parent of the nations. It cannot, therefore, be improper, at the conclusion of this speculation, and in the view we have of commemorating the great Personage by whose ministry this has been effected, to lift our minds to God himself, with sentiments of adoration and of gratitude. When we contemplate the glories of his kingdom, a kingdom which shall have no end; when we consider, with attention, the greatness of his views, views whose object is the happiness of his vast creation; we may take up the song of Moses, and of the Lamb,—“Great and
“marvellous are thy works, Lord God Al-
“mighty: Just and true are thy ways, thou
“King of saints.”

II. We have assigned, as a cause, why the Supreme Being revealed his will in parts, that religion, if it had continued under the same form, would have lost its influence ; and, therefore, it became necessary to revive it, at successive periods, by a series of revelations. The following questions may, then, be asked : Will not Christianity also lose its influence ? As we expect no farther revelation, what are men to do when this event happens ? Do there already appear symptoms of its decline ? What are these the signs of ? These questions give rise to some observations, which are both important in themselves, and are also closely connected with the service of this day.

1. In the first place, is this, Christians, the last revelation we are to expect ? Will God interpose, by extraordinary appearances, in the affairs of men no more ? From this let us learn, that the influence of religion now depends greatly upon ourselves. Let us be careful, then, for this very reason, to cultivate that religion which we have ; to preserve a-

live its spirit; and to maintain its influence upon our minds. We may consider it as the last precious benefaction of heaven to men. Let us, then, prize it much, and make it go as far as we can. Let us preserve, as long as possible, the impresson of it upon our minds. Let us transmit it down undiminished to the ages which succeed us. This was the design of our Divine Master, in instituting the feast of the Supper. Knowing how ready we are to lose the impresson of what we no longer see, he appointed this ordinance to be a memorial in his church for ever, and to recal, at stated times, the memory of these transactions. It is our interest, then, Christians, as well as our duty, and it arises from his express command, to take every opportunity of shewing forth these great events, and of preserving the memory of them, till he come again. No second prophet, no second mediator, will appear. The series of revelations is completed, religion now appears in its last form, and we have nothing farther to expect. What resource, then, remains? Or, "how shall we escape, if we neglect this salvation?"

2. We may observe, that Christianity will probably preserve its influence much longer than any preceding religion, both because it is more perfect in itself, and because it is favoured by many other concurrent circumstances. It is not loaded with ceremonies, the repetition of which becomes always tiresome, and ends at last in formality. It is a spiritual and a simple service. It takes place, not merely as the act of a society, (which is every body's business, and no body's) but as the act of individuals, and is a transaction between God and every man's own soul. It is enforced by motives of the most powerful nature, of which the expectation of a future state is one. It has been revived also at different periods, not indeed by new revelations, but by different views of the same revelation, which have produced successive, and great revolutions. Such is the history of Papal power, and its overthrow in different nations. Our controversies, too, with infidels, as well as with one another, have contributed to preserve its spirit. Lastly, there is one portion of the prophecies which is not yet fulfilled, that which re-

lates to the extent of Messiah's kingdom, which is to go on increasing, until at last it comprehends the whole earth. The spirit of religion, then, will continue to be revived, from time to time, for a space longer, by the successive conversion of those parts of the earth which have not yet embraced the Christian doctrine. This is the only circumstance wanting to the full accomplishment of the prophecies, and this, too, is fast fulfilling. The Christian powers are extending themselves gradually along the globe; and, wherever they succeed, they establish their arts and their religion. The happy period seems to be approaching, when the empire of Messiah shall "extend" from shore to shore, and cover the earth as "the waters cover the seas."

3. But as every establishment which is connected with man, however perfect it may be in itself, seems to be affected by his imperfection, we may expect that Christianity itself will partake the general fate, and that, notwithstanding all the favourable circumstances we have mentioned, its influence will at last expire. We might even fear, that this event

is at no great distance, as there are already among ourselves very visible marks of its decline. We have, at the same time, an express promise that it shall remain until the end of the world, and that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In what manner these shall be reconciled, we are not told; but, if we were allowed to conjecture, we would say, that, very probably, the period of Christianity is adjusted to the period of the world, and the events of time so ordered, as that these two shall expire together. We know that this is the last revelation, and that this also is the last age of time. We know, also, that the end of the world is described by the prophetic spirit, as a period of great licentiousness, when wickedness shall be unbounded, and when religion shall have lost all influence. Mankind are then described as being in an ungodly state. They are described as in the days of Noah, and in the days of Sodom, when the vices of men were great, and when the fire and the flood descended. As revelation discovers sin to be the cause of

death ; so, upon the same principle, it appears to be connected with the death of the world. The unbounded prevalence of vice is announced as the grand signal, and may be considered as the efficient and immediate cause of the last dreadful catastrophe of our system.—But, before this happen, the same prophetic spirit points us forward to a very remarkable revival of religion. The conversion of the Jews, and the fulness of the Gentile world, are described as taking place. What the means are by which this is to be effected, we are not told. We have already mentioned the extension of commerce, and the opening of a more liberal communication among the distant parts of the earth. If we may hazard another conjecture, we would add, that, to accomplish this event, it is also probable that Christianity will yet be presented to the world in a more perfect form, a form simple and interesting, adjusted to an improved age, and fitted to excite anew the attention of mankind. This is, indeed, but conjecture ; but it is a conjecture which is founded upon the principle we have explain-

ed, and upon the past history of religion. It is this period, very probably, which the prophetic writers delight so much to contemplate and to describe.—I must, however, observe, that the very elevated language which they *sometimes* use, when they speak of the universal virtue and peace of the world, can hardly, I fear, be applied to any state which can reasonably be expected to take place upon the earth. Men of sanguine dispositions have wished to believe, that these descriptions are, in one shape or other, *literally* to take effect, in the last ages of the world. I rather, however, think, that the prophetic spirit is here looking forward to the period of the present system, and describing the state of heaven which is to succeed to it.—To this state, then, my Christian friends, let us direct our views. Let us, with the Hebrew prophets, contemplate the issue of our present labours, and the glorious dwellings of the just. To this state we are also pointed by this solemnity, when we are reminded, that, as often as we assemble to celebrate this rite, we shew forth the death of Christ till he come

again. We are directed to commemorate his death, in connection with his second coming. This, I think, is the most probable, because it seems to be the most rational sense of the higher prophecies.—In the present world, experience teaches us, that any permanent excellence is hardly to be expected. A new order of things supposes a new nature, and new objects adjusted to it. While the human passions, and the objects about which they are conversant, remain as they are, that universal virtue and peace, which the prophets describe as residing upon the earth, in the latter ages, are scarcely to be looked for. On the contrary, we have already observed, that the end of time is described, in other passages of the scriptures, as a period of great licentiousness. Religion is represented *then*, as in former periods, to have lost her influence. To expect any thing else, may lead us, not only into many fanciful, but (which is worse) into many practical mistakes. The world has, at different periods, felt sufficiently the effects of delusive theories. While, then, we believe, and pray for, the happy period when

religion shall produce her perfect effect, and when all disorders shall cease throughout the world, let us not too sanguinely suppose that these events are to take place in the present state. Let us beware of perfect theories, or indulging our imaginations in the contemplation of perfect schemes. From an imperfect nature, let us not expect a perfect order of things. Let us not expect more from man than he is fitted to give, or fondly think that he *will* be very different from what he *has* been.—Venerating our divine Master, let our views be directed towards his second appearance. Employing the glass of revelation, let us bring that grand period, with the important events which are connected with it, nearer to our minds. Let us look for the sign of the Son of Man, when the heavens shall be on fire, and when one tremendous conflagration shall inwrap the worlds. Reverting now, as we may do, to our general principle, and also pursuing our present speculation, what an awful and magnificent view of the universe, and of its government, again opens to us. The general conflagration is to be con-

sidered, not merely as the means employed to put a period to the present worlds, but chiefly as the last terrible manifestation of the divine displeasure against wickedness. We behold, for the last time, the evil quality of vice, and its last dreadful explosions in the system. The history of our species here closes; and, connecting the first period with the last, flashes upon our astonished minds the same awful lesson. We behold, at far distant periods, the world of waters, and the world of fire, leaving their respective habitations, and employed, by the omnipotent hand of God, to overwhelm the worlds of the ungodly. We connect these terrible manifestations, with all the intervenient disorders which the same cause has uniformly produced; and, from the whole history of our species, and of our state, we deduce our conclusions against vice, and form our ideas of the grand moral government of God.—But, Christians, it is our comfort that we can also contemplate, with equal certainty, the other side of this interesting spectacle. Amidst these desolating, dreadful scenes, we behold the quality of virtue ope-

rating, and good men safe. We observe her happy influences, and the Almighty Being, through all the clouds and confusions which may be raised by vice, bringing order forth, and regarding his great moral family with complacence. The waters may overwhelm, or the flames inwrap the worlds, (these shall do their work) but, under the moral government of God, good men are protected. The ravages of vice, and explosions of the elements, (which are very probably only its natural consequences) are but temporary. These tend, though with dreadful rapidity, to destruction. But virtue, and her effects, remain. The present earth, the theatre of so many crimes, shall no doubt be removed. The globe, with all the pollutions which adhere to it, like the flash of a meteor, shall explode, and disappear. The heavens and earth, that now are, shall pass away, and no place be found for them. But there shall be a new earth, new heavens, and a new order of things, into which vice, with the disorders which she produces, shall not be admitted.

“ There is a river, whose streams make glad
“ the city of God. God is in the midst of
“ her, and she shall not be moved.”—Let us,
then, Christians, lift our heads, and look upwards. Amidst the signals which are hung from on high, and which seem to be approaching still nearer to us, let us contemplate the close of the present world, and the commencement of the eternal kingdom. Let us connect the present with the future scenes; and see virtue still improving, and, as she improves, advancing. Let us, with the faith which religion gives, look forward to that state which shall succeed to the disorders of the present;—when our nature shall be changed; when new and higher objects shall take place of those about which we are now employed; when we shall receive spiritual bodies; “ when,” to use the expressive language of the scriptures, “ this corruptible shall be
“ clothed with incorruption, this mortal shall
“ put on immortality;” when the children of the resurrection shall come forth, and we shall become citizens of an eternal world.—Thus

let us live, thus think, and thus improve ; advancing still, with humble diffidence, towards the perfection of our moral nature ; and, with this view, remembering our Divine Master, studying his wise precepts, contemplating his important life, and continuing to “ shew forth “ his death, until he come again.”



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ERRATA.

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14. 3. *For advantage, read advantages.*
98. 21. 22. *For blesses all who are in connection with him, read, blesses all who are connected or concerned with him.*
99. 10. *For it and its, read she and hers.*
191. 13. *For most, read must.*
193. 8. *For empires, read empire.*
214. 1. *For relieve, read retrieve.*
284. 12. *For another, read one another.*

